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THE COUNTRY GENTLEMAN
AND OTHER ESSAYS

THE
COUNTRY GENTLEMAN
AND OTHER ESSAYS

BY

GODFREY
LOCKER LAMPSON



JONATHAN CAPE
THIRTY BEDFORD SQUARE
LONDON

FIRST PUBLISHED 1932

JONATHAN CAPE LTD., 30 BEDFORD SQUARE, LONDON
AND 91 WELLINGTON STREET WEST, TORONTO
JONATHAN CAPE & HARRISON SMITH INC.
139 EAST 46TH STREET, NEW YORK

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY J. AND J. GRAY, EDINBURGH
PAPER MADE BY JOHN DICKINSON AND CO. LTD.
BOUND BY A. W. BAIN AND CO. LTD.

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SOME of these papers have appeared in the *National Review*, *Cornhill Magazine*, *Contemporary Review*, *Spectator*, *London Mercury*, *Chambers's Journal*, *Saturday Review*, and the *Nineteenth Century*, to the editors of which my thanks are due.

THE COUNTRY GENTLEMAN
AND OTHER ESSAYS

I

THE PREMIERSHIP

LEADERSHIP of the party in power is as much the business of an expert as the management of a racing stable or a diocese. A bishop would be as unfitted to pilot a foal from the home paddock to Epsom Downs as a man unversed in politics to sway a meeting at the Carlton Club. If the public think, as some of them doubtless do, that the time at the disposal of the leader of a party is distributed between the delivery of speeches and their preparation, they are in innocent ignorance. These form only a small, although an indispensable and highly important part of his labours and anxieties. Some leaders make few speeches, others deem it in their interest to make many more; but whether their orations be few or many, they are comparatively only a fraction of the work that has to be transacted by them almost without intermission from one year's end to the other. The Leader has to think out the architectonic of his power, stone by stone—the foundations, walls, roof, pillars, buttresses and arches. Unless it be knit into a self-supporting whole it may fall to pieces at any moment.

The territory over which he must keep an ever-vigilant eye may be divided into three parts—the country at large, the House of Commons, and,

lastly, the Cabinet. A revulsion of feeling in the first, an adverse vote in the second, a split in the third, may bring his mansion tumbling about his ears. If his chieftainship is seriously challenged in the Cabinet or in Parliament he must either resign or appeal to the electorate. But, if he loses the country, there is for the nonce no more hope.

His chief concern, when once he has climbed to power, must therefore be so to entrench himself in the affections and confidence of the general public as to escape more than a temporary set-back should either of the two props of his Government give way. What the country looks for in a Prime Minister are character, disinterestedness, prudence, and efficiency. Of brilliancy it is suspicious, of sudden change timid, of weakness impatient, of grievances unforgetful. The pilot who hopes to remain at the helm must watch his reputation like a bride her chastity. His policy must be one to invite support, his personality to tempt it, his reputation to engage it, and his organization to keep it when it has been won. His reputation may be unblemished, but he may be so lacking in personality that his followers may be at their wits' ends to raise a cheer when his name is mentioned. Every procession should sport a flag; so too is a party all the more heartened when they can see their banner fluttering in the breeze.

But personality, reputation, and policy are not enough. He must have out his scouts, evangelists, and pressmen in every corner of the land, to stimulate endearment for the first, respect for the second, and interest in the third. His campaigning machinery must be under the generalship of a

friend in whom he can place implicit confidence for loyalty and ability. The costly crusade of publicity and glorification must be relentless and yet so skilfully conducted as to appear but the natural surge of impulsive human nature.

Here is a task to tax the capacity of any Leader. How wary he must be in public and private life, in his habits and demeanour, at home and abroad, in the observations he lets fall among his friends and those who are not, for the former can be as dangerous as the latter. How cautiously must he select the agencies for propaganda, for the dissemination of his merits and the promulgation of the party doctrine. How wisely he must formulate the policy to attract and to bind. For here he has to discover and compound the precise blend of material and idealistic appeal to suit the temperament of the people with whom he has to treat. For they are an admixture of good and bad. They are human and they are British. There is the massive middle-class, the organized ranks of manual labour and the small but influential minority of the aristocracy. He can make profound changes if he clothes them in the garb of old tradition, for humbug and love of self-deception is part of the make-up of his vast constituency. Neither can snobbery be left out of his reckoning, for it has saved the country ere now from several revolutions. The British people are fond of the established order, for each class looks some day to climb into the one above it and admires it accordingly, and likes not to see it destroyed nor to have too much muck thrown against it. Their interests also are essentially commercial. Financial

stability is the sheet-anchor of their creed and woe betide the statesman who happens to forget it. Dictators they have no use for, the ichor of freedom has run too long in their veins. They have only to suspect that a Leader regards himself as irreplaceable or that he is acquiring too great an ascendancy, to exchange him for another without hesitation and without regret. This last characteristic is at the root of the strength and popularity of the party system which never allows one man to be too long in power. There is, moreover, the sporting feeling that each of the principal parties may as well have its turn, for so many expectations remain unfulfilled that there is always the possibility that a succeeding administration will do more than the last. How sagacious therefore must a Leader be when, assailed by demands from every interest, he has to present his programme to the country. How circumspect if, having won its confidence, he wishes to keep it. And yet this is only one department of his herculean labours. His toil verily is never finished until death or defeat release him.

His work in the House of Commons is as arduous as any. Three different kinds of opportunity are afforded him there of consolidating his position—public, semi-public, and private—in the Chamber of the House, the Lobby, and his own room. In the first he lives in the full glare of day; the searchlight of the Press never leaves him, and every spoken word is *ex cathedra*. In the second he can chat informally with groups or individuals as he mingles with the ebb and flow. In the third he can see any particular individual he wants to single out, unbe-

known to anybody but his private secretaries. A Prime Minister ought to be constantly in and out of the Chamber of the House, watching the progress of business and debate, familiarizing himself with the idiosyncrasies and abilities of his supporters and foes, gauging the ever-changing temper of the assembly, keeping his finger on its beating pulse. For the moment may come when he will be able to take advantage of a Parliamentary situation and score a success or turn a vote. He should frequently take occasion to listen to the speeches of those on his own benches, pitilessly fatiguing though they may be, manifest interest when such is deserved and simulate it sometimes when it is not. Nothing is calculated to bind a young member more closely to his Leader than to feel that his efforts have been noticed and appreciated. His voice should be audible in every part of the Chamber, for a mumbling delivery is irritating to everyone and detracts from the importance and dignity of a message. As it is only by perpetual practice that readiness in debate can be achieved, he should not allow his own work in the House of Commons to be done for him by subordinates. On some days he will speak better than on others, but his general repute will rest not upon his best nor his worst, but upon the level of his average, and that can only be enhanced by sustained endeavour.

The usefulness of the Lobby is twofold. It enables him to run up against his supporters informally and supplies an opportunity of observing what is going on more or less behind the scenes. For in the term 'Lobby' is included here all those rooms, halls, and

passages that go to make up the purlieus and precincts of the Chamber of the House—the division lobbies, the Members' lobby, the Library, the dining-room, the smoking-room, and even the terrace. In the division lobby he can mark every member of his party who may be passing through, while in the remainder he can note in a casual and unostentatious way who are intimates, who are busy with the pressmen, who are aloof, who seem to be disgruntled, who are solicitous to please, and can store all these impressions in his memory for later reference. He will have to listen patiently to fools and bores, but may glean some useful crumbs of intelligence in various unexpected quarters. The Lobby is an important element in Parliamentary life, for it is the nursery of revolt, a hot-bed of intrigue and a sensitive barometer of failure or success. From the countenances of friend and foe alike the Leader can tell whether he is mounting up or slipping back.

In his private room another kind of business can be transacted. Quite apart from routine work, he can here interview any member of the party whom he may wish to see and without the formality attaching to a special appointment at his official residence. Excepting for the secretarial staff who may be sitting next door, no one need know that Mr. A. or Mr. B. is closeted with him. Indeed, it often happens that through an independent door Mr. A. may be conducted by the Leader himself into this *sanctum* without a third person knowing anything about it at all. Here in seclusion confidences can be exchanged with high and low,

young and old, as between man and man, and the very secrets of the soul laid bare and explored. Mr. A. may have valuable information to impart, or he may be nursing a grievance and the Leader may want to conciliate him, or gain his adherence to some plan, or prevent some move upon the political chess-board. In these intimate and confidential talks a hostile critic may almost be converted into a life-long friend and the glamour of such a *tête-à-tête* with the First Minister of the Crown has been known to transmogrify the outlook and turn the head of a recalcitrant back-bencher. The Leader, however, should never let it transpire that he grants these interviews broadcast or frequently. They should be supposed to be exceptional, a privilege extended rarely and to but few, or they will lose their virtue. But in reality they should be accorded whenever it may prove of service. A plot, a rebellion, a cave, a betrayal, may be nipped in its birth, nay, almost in its maturity by a personal appeal, a little judicious commendation, the bait of possible favours to come, a timely warning, or whatever salve or deterrent may suit the ambitions and temper of the man he has to deal with. It is a golden chance never to be missed, for all the foibles of character, all the generous and selfish impulses of human nature can here be plumbed without any of the outside world being any the wiser.

But to ease the task of the Leader in the House of Commons, or rather to make it possible, the services of a Chief Whip in whom he can place implicit trust are indispensable. The Chief Whip and his assistants are the eyes and ears of the Prime Minister. They

must discover who is dangerous and who safe, who wants something or nothing, who is ambitious, who lazy and who diligent, who rich and who poor. There are some half-dozen main reasons why men submit themselves to the penance of political life. Some do so to improve their social position, others for financial and business considerations, some again in order to gain power or importance, some to maintain the family tradition or to please a neighbourhood, some for the sake of the game, others to obtain promotion in the legal profession, and some, not quite so rare as the cynics would have us suppose, with the sole object of working for their country's good. It is the business of the Whips to know and to sift all these categories and be able to affix the correct tag of his class to each member when they see him. Mr. A. would like a knighthood and Sir B. C. a peerage. Another thinks that a Privy Councillorship is due to him, or a Recordership or Under-Secretaryship or other minor office in the Government. Or Mr. D. may be hankering after a Governorship for his lady to queen it over semi-savages or a directorship to supplement his income. Others are hungry for any kind of recognition, it hardly matters what. Or someone higher up may be after Cabinet rank or promotion for a relative or hanger-on, while Lord E. is eager for a chance to make a speech because his constituents are getting restive or he believes he is a Demosthenes under a bushel. The offices, honours, opportunities, places, remunerative posts in the gift or within the influence of the Leader are many, and though the aspirants may be still more numerous, a multitude of mouths

can be filled and a goodly number of the famished sent feasting away. It is in this sphere that the Whips can be of inestimable value to the Leader in the satisfaction of just claims and in fencing with less worthy importunities, quite apart from their more conspicuous duties in connection with the arrangement of Government business and its smooth conduct through the House.

The latter is not unlike a public school. The members are grown-up boys under their head and lower masters. There is a *camaraderie* between friends and antagonists alike. Character is the best asset a man can bring with him and eloquence is rather mistrusted than not. The House is an indulgent body and will nearly always give one of its number fair play. What it cannot forgive is that he should deliberately deceive it and play it false. It is a cockpit where each finds his level, where pretence is stripped and humbug ripped open and the qualities a man possesses given the due they respectively deserve. If a member wins its confidence it is loth to take it back, but from a bad start there is often a long recovery. It is like a sea where a squall without warning may spring up suddenly and at times disastrously. It is like a musical instrument that a master may play upon at his will. But as it takes all kinds to make it, it takes a many-sided man to understand it and rule it.

Finally, a Prime Minister has his Cabinet to deal with. If a rift occurs here, it may widen into a breach and so into a chasm and the whole edifice of his Government topple down. A Cabinet is generally a composite of diverse temperaments,

unequal abilities, dissimilar outlooks, and mixed opinions. A proportion of it in all probability wanted some other Chief and may still be looking that way. A few of its members hope one day to succeed him. Among them also are those who dislike certain of their colleagues and others who are intimates. There are those too who cannot be trusted either for loyalty or discretion. It is this unmatched team of different colours, sizes, paces, and tempers which the Leader has to drive, some with a slack and some with a tight rein. He must play off one against the other, and one section against the other, yet without the appearance or suspicion of doing so. If there is a serious divergence of opinion he had better not take sides, but plead delay for further consideration, and in the meantime, make private efforts to redress the balance on the side he wants to come down or search for a compromise in the interests of unity. The Cabinet as a whole can rarely be taken into his complete confidence. There should be an inner nucleus composed of his closest and most trusted political friends. If any danger arises which menaces the stability of his administration from within, they, at least, can combine in his support and at any moment by their influence help to avert a catastrophe. The principal care of a Leader in forming his Cabinet should be, not so much to ensure that every member of it is talented, as that, as far as possible, they will be loyal. Great attainments are not essential in most of the offices of State. Sound judgment and the capacity to take advice is all that is generally required. The country is largely governed by the

Civil Service who regard politicians as a necessary evil, as birds of passage, ill-informed and self-important, here to-day and gone to-morrow. In most Departments they take very good care that the particular Minister they are saddled with for the time being does not kick over the traces. With the exception of two or three of the highest offices, a Prime Minister can fill his Cabinet with men of proved but second-rate ability without any hazard, so long as they are devoted to his person and assiduous in their official duties. But let him beware ere he admit to his counsels those who may turn against him when storms are crashing against his bulwarks or who run their own course regardless of the interests of his Government, or he will never be safe from treachery or defeat. In some cases, however, it is more prudent to have an ambitious and unscrupulous man as a colleague than to leave him outside, for he can then be watched from close quarters and measures taken to counteract his designs before it is too late.

To be Prime Minister is a dazzling, aye, a dizzy position. It is a post of isolation where conduct has to be shaped and decisions taken irrespective of private affections or the prejudices of the past. A Premier gets a bird's-eye view of the whole panorama when the majority of men perceive only a corner of it, and in emergencies has to take the long view, making up his mind what, over a course of years, will be best for the people under his care. The study of these vast affairs, during which the State becomes the sovereign mistress of his heart and thoughts, is apt to render him impersonal and unfit

for private friendship, so that in time he holds himself more aloof and is less accessible to those about him. He becomes a lonely figure, averse to giving explanations and impatient of criticism, and from this he slips, unless he is watchful, into arbitrary methods and autocratic rule. He will have to make many sacrifices, of family life, of peace of mind, of leisure, of privacy, of unpremeditated and unhampered intercourse, of nearly everything that makes sweet the life of the ordinary man. But in spite of these it is a proud thing to govern a great nation, and to be Premier of Britain even for a short space, with her splendid past and mighty possibilities, is worth much of the heartache, anxiety, and disappointment that she will be sure to cost him.

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THE POLITICAL CAREERIST

THE most valuable assets for a man of average capacity who wishes to make politics his business in life are a tough physique and a faculty for ready and plausible speech. With indifferent health opportunities are missed, energies are crippled, colleagues and allies grow weary of his ailments, and cease finally to count upon him, and he becomes very soon a disappointment to himself as well as to his friends. A tough fibre is like a large balance at the bank, which can be drawn upon, and drawn upon again, to meet demands which would utterly exhaust a smaller fortune. The ordeal of electioneering in all weathers, the constant strain of prolonged sittings in the House, the unremitted calls upon time and brain at all seasons, are enough, after a score of years, to drain the vitality of all but the strongest. The weaker ones will drop out of the hurly-burly with quivering nerves, their spirit broken, or their health seriously undermined. Only the hardest will survive.

A gift of speech is likewise indispensable, for no parliament of debaters ever yet recognized silent merit. You may be as wise as Diogenes, but if you are mum you will be of no account. You must make up your mind to be either a player or one of the

pit. You must be feared or found useful to secure a claim for advancement. It is not necessary to have brilliant talents, and to be intellectual is sometimes an obstacle. To be ready and to the point will be of far more advantage than any erudition or reputation for wit.

It is safer for a politician 'on the make' to follow a party than an individual. For the latter may fall sick, or make irretrievable blunders, or even die, and you will have an invalid, an outcast, or a corpse left on your hands. But a party can recover from its errors, however gross, for its mistakes are corporate. A new leader can be found, and the old one turned adrift like a scape-goat into the desert. A party also looks merely to its own interests. You cannot outrage its vanity or stale in its affection. It has no sensitiveness or nice feeling. So long as you are useful to it, it will never throw you over. But with an individual it is different. You may still be useful, but if his pride is wounded, he may discard you like an old sock; or if your company has become distasteful, he will seek another follower and forget the old acquaintance. Moreover, he may attach himself to an unpopular cause and lose the power to further your interests. Therefore, cultivate the favour of your party and usefully serve it without remission, and however much you may grumble or criticize it, it will remember your allegiance when the time comes. For the party is a machine and you are one of its integral parts. The driver may be changed from time to time, but that does not affect the general scheme of the mechanism, which may go slower or

faster as occasion bids, but yields to no pressure outside its own law.

To be ever within call is a golden rule for the pretender to success. For if he is always on the spot, no chance can slip him by. The temperament of a man remains in its essentials the same through life, but his moods may vary from hour to hour. At four o'clock he may be elated, at six o'clock surly, at eight despondent, at ten friendly, and if you meet him at ten o'clock a link may be forged, a confidence imparted, an invitation given, that will make the whole difference in a career. The most that any man can do is never to neglect an opportunity, and one way for the ambitious politician to catch the chances in his net is ceaselessly to haunt the chief place where the other political gamesters are gathered together.

Unless he has a discreet wit, it is safer for the novice never to jest in public speech. It is better to be dull than saddled with a reputation for buffoonery or to be thought light or vulgar. Aim rather at a reputation for seriousness, and, though you be thought a trifle over-serious, your position will be half made. But in private conversation be light in hand, courteous, amiable, and in manner open, but never letting fall a word that you would mind being overheard by friend or foe. For the envious will be ever on the watch to twist your meaning and carry to others what you may have said.

It is wiser to accept even the smallest employment than to remain on the shelf. If you are too proud to be employed in some humble office, the time will come when you will be too old to be

employed anywhere. The works-manager has his eye on all the departments, and if a man makes himself useful in one, his services some day will be wanted for another. That moderate ability should recognize itself for what it is, is one of the first lessons in success. To set its claim too high is the microbe that lurks in the brain of mediocrity. It spells the missing of opportunities, perhaps the one opening that will be given - the single offer of Fortune to the average man.

It is not necessary for the careerist to be burdened with principles. Let his party be his principles. For it may jettison its convictions as crises arise, sacrificing them like pawns upon a chess-board; and if his principles are too rigid, he may have to part company with it altogether, and so lose the chance of his turn for preferment. For a party has no soul. It uses the fittest instrument at hand to gain or remain in power. It is bound by no pledge or moral law, but ultimately rests upon nothing more substantial than a similarity of temperament in the main body of its members.

It is dangerous to trust a man whom you have once made an enemy. He may trip you up some day, however conciliatory your attitude may be. Therefore, do not attempt to be reconciled. Go rather upon the assumption that he will never forgive what he deems to be an injury. Treat with him civilly, but as though he ever had his hand upon a dagger, and you will avoid many a treacherous and vindictive thrust.

Keep a watchful eye on the mistakes of others.

Catalogue them in your brain, for in the mere avoidance of them yourself you will acquire a name for discretion and ability. Certain errors are venial, forgotten almost in the commission; others are less pardoned in the pretender to success. A long purgation may be necessary to wipe them out. But some errors can almost extinguish a political career. Too impudent a retort may illustrate the first kind; a poor exhibition in a critical debate the second; and a deliberate misleading of the House in a personal explanation to it, the third. As for the first, it is policy to treat the older statesmen with studied courtesy, for this is gratifying to age, and those who are a little below them will know what to expect from you. As for the second, when your party is in need of support on an important occasion, speak not at all, unless your case is presentable, for a poor defence will harm it more than your silence, and the managers will remember it against you. As for the last kind of error, it is one that the House rarely forgives. For it offends the honour of every individual in it. The greater part of them may loathe your politics and yet respect you as a man. But if you are discovered trying to deceive them with a calculated lie when you are taking them into your confidence, they will feel towards you much as the rest of a table regard the sharper who has been caught packing the cards.

It is best, therefore, to enter the arena in early youth rather than in middle-age. For there is then time to live down almost the worst that can happen, and to rise like a phoenix from its own ashes. Twenty years will wipe out most disgrace. But if

you wait until you are forty, the strength that remains to you may scarcely be enough to carry you safe to the port of arrival.

Despise not the influence that women may exert upon your fate. They care nothing for parties or abstract figments. All their thoughts are personal. Two or three of them may be of more service to a man than the support of half the Treasury or Opposition bench. Their influence is continuous, and doubly potent, because exercised at the softer moments when men's minds are relaxed and their wills unbent. All the more deadly, therefore, is a woman's enmity, for she will miss no opportunity of sowing some day the seeds of your discomfiture. There are few who can afford to dispense with women's help, and when they have once espoused your cause, they will never desert you.

Practise your gift of speech by speaking often. Oblige the managers by speaking for them in the country, and earn their gratitude by supporting the party in the House. You will thus have to cultivate two styles, one for the platform and the other for the Legislature. For if you employ the first in the House of Commons, you will incur the derision of its members, and if you address a public meeting as you would the Speaker, you will very likely empty the room. Do not forget that all your colleagues have listened to platform rhetoric a thousand times and repeated it *ad nauseam* themselves, for the most effective stump oratory is largely made up of it. They are not, therefore, likely to welcome the jargon at their own board. A couple of travellers in a similar line of goods will not bargain over a deal

in quite the same manner as with an outside customer not in the trade.

If a minister gets into difficulties in debate, seize the occasion to help him out. The worse his case, the more grateful will he be for your assistance, and speak of you as a likely man with brains and a future. At every turn the careerist must be a staunch partisan, hostile to the opposing phalanxes, whatever right they may have on their side. If something they do meets with his approval, let him approve it not too loudly. He may praise them in his heart, but less with his lips. For fair play to an opponent may be misinterpreted as trimming, and a trimmer is never trusted.

It should not be supposed, however, that a mere party hack, cringing to the party whip and licking the boots of those in power, will be as successful as he who shows at the proper moment a little independence. On the contrary, it is well from time to time, when the party's interests are not at stake, to adopt an independent attitude. The question may be one of procedure or convenience, or of some issue where the boundaries of faction have for the nonce disappeared, or where perhaps the party managers have deviated a little from the party gospel. In these cases a show of independence will be counted as a mark of spirit, and the managers will make a note of the member as one who might easily, were he ignored or put out, make himself objectionable or even dangerous. The little 'mutiny' will have served its turn and can be repeated with discretion as occasions arise. But revolt upon the grander scale is to court disaster, for, except in the

case of a very exceptional rebel, the machine will never forgive him and will be sure to crush him in the end.

The Press is a powerful engine. If you stand well with its servants you will have another string to your bow. Even Governments cannot afford to ignore them, and if it is known that the Press is your friend, the party managers will be all the more careful how they treat you.

Whether in the long run it will be found that happiness has been achieved is another matter. For political success may mean anxious, weary waiting, and laborious, health-consuming hours, and, at length, when the dish is set before you, the meat may have begun to lose its savour. To one with an artistic or literary temperament the career will be unsatisfying, the methods of attainment unspeakably tedious. To a lover of the country-side it will be odious. To a man of an adventurous, unconventional spirit, insufferably jejune. But to a certain type—hard-headed, ambitious, energetic, it will be the career of all others. Its principal prizes bestow much power, even its lesser ones rank and considerable influence; and, in addition, there is always the satisfaction, so long as a man remains a member of Parliament, in the thought that he is at least in the midst of great affairs, weighty with historical and national import, and taking part as a unit, however small, in a vital controlling force which is ruling the destinies of a mighty people.

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III

THE COUNTRY GENTLEMAN

THE country gentleman, as we have known him, will soon be a thing of the past, a reminiscence, a tradition, and then, perhaps, a figure forgotten altogether. For good or for evil his doom is sealed. During the life of the present generation his revenue has dwindled and his influence diminished until to-day the possession of a country seat is generally a burden and a handicap, rather than an advantage to him who owns it. He began by losing what political power he had. With the extension of the franchise his opinion at elections gradually counted for less. Up till then, the farmers who were his tenants had exercised the vote, and the agricultural labourers whom they employed had been practically voiceless. But the hinds had now not only the suffrage, but were better educated, and voted, when they had a mind to, against their masters; and as these took their cue from the Squire, the latter for the first time was liable to find himself in a small and humiliating minority. But he could not be damaged in his political influence without his social prestige suffering as well. He was no longer cock of the walk. Another rooster was crowing on an adjacent dung-hill. The farmer's wife might still drop him a curtsy, but the national

destinies were now in other hands, and his ploughmen and carters were aware of it, and his lawyer, his doctor, and the local tradesmen also.

On the top of this came an ever-increasing load of imposts. First of all the death-duties, that compelled him to lay aside a yearly sum out of his income to insure his life for his wife and children. Then the super-tax, which necessitated a substantial reduction of establishment, the felling of timber, or the sale of valuables. Lastly, the swinging additional taxation for the purposes of the Great War, coupled with soaring wages and high prices, forcing him, after a brief but helpless struggle, to sell his farms one by one, and ultimately the paternal roof itself, which has resulted in a large proportion of the soil of England changing hands during the last few years, and its subdivision among a far greater number of the population. With no political power, with his social prestige steadily on the wane, with, at best, three-quarters of his land alienated for ever, and with insufficient means to keep the remainder of his property even in repair, he has become a subject for pity, almost of ridicule, to the rest of the world. He has been shorn of nearly all his possessions, of the larger part of the honours that depended on them, and of most of the links that bound him with the past, and his pride now has little else to rest upon than barren and tormenting memories.

Only a few years ago, an income of £5000 a year enabled a landowner to make his estate his home, to spend a few weeks in the summer in London or abroad, to educate his children as befitted gentlefolk, to keep a hunter or two and a carriage for his wife,

to preserve some game, to entertain his neighbours when he so pleased, and to live in dignity and considerable style. But a revenue of £5000 at that time represented a net income of only about £250 to £300 short of that figure, after rates and taxes had been paid. It now means one of under £3000. And as wages have doubled and prices with them, it may safely be affirmed that money is worth but half of what it was, and that £3000 thirty years ago, that is to say, within the memory of a man of middle age, is equivalent to-day to only about £1500. This has spelt disaster for the country gentleman. He has parted with his land bit by bit, then his horses, and pictures, or his wife's jewels, and has let his house to strangers for a term of years, and finally sold it, and is now to be found modestly transplanted either in town or country, and putting as good a face upon the matter as he can. In fact, to have kept up his former state, instead of a revenue of £5000, he would have needed at least three times as much.

This disappearance of the Squire has been one of the features of our time, little noticed at the moment by those not immediately concerned, but pregnant with far-reaching consequences. It has taken place rapidly and noiselessly, without complaint. Ancient families, that have dwelt for hundreds of years in the same spot, have left their ancestral homes one day for the last time, almost furtively, practically unobserved, with none but their gardeners to see them go. The Great War has been as fatal to them as the Wars of the Roses to the nobles of the fifteenth century, and in a short while a country gentleman living upon the proceeds of his estate of a couple of

thousand acres of farm and woodland, with his hunting and his shooting, his good cheer and unpaid public work, will be as rare a spectacle in a week's travel through our English country-side as a Camberwell Beauty or a golden eagle.

Before he takes his final departure, it may not be amiss to render him a passing tribute, or rather to glance at the loss or the gain that society will have made when once he has gone for ever. For this purpose he may be pictured the average type of Squire as we have known him in the past, with his £5000 of revenue and two or three thousand acres. He will have chosen a wife from a respectable county stock and be on familiar terms with his fellow-landowners within a radius of ten miles. His time will be divided between sport, the management of his estate, and local public duties. His sons will be at college and his daughters finishing their education at home, and the rest of the indoor household will consist of a butler and footman and perhaps six or seven other servants, with a companion or governess in addition for his girls. There will be a coachman and groom in the stables, and three or four gardeners will prune his lady's roses, mow his lawns, grow his vegetables, and force a little fruit in a vinery and peach-house. Two estate men will also be necessary to keep the ditches clear, clip the hedges, mend the gates and fences, and cut the firewood for the use of the house. In addition to these, there will be a couple of keepers to rear five or six hundred pheasants to stock his coverts, to look after any other game on the estate, and keep poachers and trespassers away; and if there be a

small home farm, a hand or two will also be required there. From the first of September, when the earliest partridges can be shot, he will have several days of strenuous and exhilarating exercise, walking with his dogs over the sunburnt stubbles and tramping through fields of turnip and potato. On the first of the following month the all-important pheasant shooting begins, which off and on will give him varying sport on his own land and that of his friends until the first day of February. During all this time he will be entertaining his neighbours or entertained by them, while his daughters will be gaining some experience of the world.

In fact, nothing has been more characteristic of English rural life than the country gentleman's shoot. For months beforehand the keepers have had an anxious time—first of all searching the woods and hedgerows for the pheasants' eggs in April and May, and getting them in before they can be sucked by jays, rooks, jackdaws, or hedgehogs, or cracked by the frosts; then hatching them under broody hens; then rearing the little feathered things in coops in some sheltered field in June and July; then carrying them, when old enough, into their destined coverts; and finally keeping them together and out of harm's way from foxes, stoats, weasels and other vermin, as well as predatory man, until the fateful day. Directly the leaf is sufficiently off the trees, say, in November, the Squire will fill his house with company, and on the morning of the big shoot perhaps a gun or two from near by will join them. The beaters, a dozen or fifteen in number, chosen for their trustiness from workers on the estate, and clad

in smock-frocks, congregate for the occasion after breakfast, the twenty or so 'stops' or boys having been posted at critical places outside the coverts earlier in the morning. What a day of qualms it is for host and keeper! For weeks, nay, almost for months, the 'beats' have been mapped out. A 'hot corner' is arranged for the last drive before lunch and another to end up with in the evening. But it is quite likely that Fortune will be perverse. Many of the birds fly back over the beaters' heads, or escape in a long stream at some point inadequately defended, or it rains, or snows, or the most distinguished guest has hardly any shooting, and some unimportant gun gets far too much, or the hounds have been through the woods the day before and scattered the birds to the four corners of the estate. Luncheon, however, makes up for some of the disappointments. On a wintry day it is difficult, when you are hungry, even if you are the host, to be depressed for long, with a smoking pot of Irish-stew and platters of plum pudding and mince-pies in front of you, crowned with a jug or two of generous brew. The keeper's wife, who has lent her best room for the event (for the ladies from the Hall have come), has lit a roaring fire, and photographs of the Squire's forebears look down upon you from the mantelpiece. The old rafters, black with age, have often rung with the laughter of these parties, and the sideboard groans with specimens of the chase. Even the beaters, who may be soaked to the skin or numb with cold, think all their discomforts well worth it, when a square meal of bread and meat, and cheese and ale is set before them. It is an opportunity for

them, too, to pick up a little news of the outside world, for the loaders have some gossip from other big houses which can be retailed at leisure in the local 'pub.' And so, after a little more sport, the shoot comes to an end in the twilight, and a brace or so of birds having been set aside for each of the guests, the rest of the bag—pheasants, hares, rabbits, partridges, woodcock, wild-duck, or snipe—is hung up in the larder, some for the Squire's kitchen, some for the hospital and certain poor relations, and what is left for the local poulterer; and the keeper goes home to his pipe and supper thanking God that the day is well over.

Or, maybe, our Squire is a hunting man, and the hounds will meet at his house. What a spectacle is it then, as the pink coats keep on arriving, and the huntsmen and the pack, and all the mixed multitude of followers in carts, traps, on bicycles, and on foot! The privileged are invited within and their mettle's edge still further whetted with a short but fiery draught, with a sandwich added as an apology for the other. And then off the whole motley concourse starts, making ruin of the Squire's pheasant shooting for a week to come, but thinking him a good fellow and sportsman, as undoubtedly he is. For though they break his fences, leave his gates open, and disfigure his lawns with hoof and wheel marks, no one will have enjoyed the day more than he. Many a shilling is gathered on these occasions by gate-openers, fox-viewers, stirrup-holders, horse-catchers, and sundry other pickers-up of loose coin. In fact, it is a public holiday for the district where the Squire resides, and everyone, of whatever sex or age, gets

something tangible or immaterial out of it, whether in food, cash, excitement, a subject for discussion, or agreeable exercise. Even the keeper, whose birds have been harried from one covert to another, gets a substantial tip from the hunt if a fox is found. All the year round one sport or another is being encouraged by the Squire. For there may be a local cricket club, and his park will be the scene of many a village match. Or football may be the rage, and he will give the team a ground to play on. Whatever be the fashion of the moment, he does his best to share his privileges with those about him, and is pretty certain to be president of all the men's associations and the patron of every outing, festival, concert, or carnival that may take place in the neighbourhood.

Then there are his public engagements—those commitments that often irk, but which he feels it his duty to perform—the Bench, the County or the Parish Council, the Board of Guardians, the Vestry meetings of the living in his own gift, the innumerable gatherings and committees on every conceivable question of the day. Here he not only meets his inferiors and social equals, but his superiors as well, and learns the ways of the great world. He is a unit in the government of his country, helping to make by-laws, to levy rates, to secure the health and safety of the citizens, and to administer justice to all and sundry. He does all this unpaid, without a doit's worth of reward, with inconvenience to himself, and sometimes even at considerable expense—not as a rule for the sake of ambition, but purely from a sense of public duty. Here he is seen at his

best, for he is no politician scheming for advancement. He has no axe to grind, and would be heartily relieved if someone else would do the work. But so long as it has to be done he is ready to lend a hand, and while his health and strength last would be ashamed to shirk it. Has the recording angel set down all these hours spent in fulfilment of duty, with no thought in the background of self-aggrandisement or material gain, when it would have been so easy to plead other occupations and to have escaped all the tedium and responsibility, and sometimes even the odium, of these unrequited labours?

But the Squire appears in his most attractive part when going the round of the estate with his agent or bailiff. It is then that his humanity triumphs over his interest. It is as though he regarded his tenants and those he employed more as members of his family than alien blood and contributors to his revenue. Several of his cottages are given free to old retainers, who have grown grey in his service or who knew and worked for his father and grandfather. Some other cottager has now asked for a reduction of rent, as children have been born, or the breadwinner has had a long illness and no wages have come in. A lower rental would mean a direct loss, taking repairs and other outgoings into account, but, although the bailiff may reason against it, in ninety-nine times out of a hundred the tenant will get his wish. The Squire would sooner go without a hunter than refuse any of these people. Or perhaps an aged tenant has died and his son is anxious to take the farm on the same easy terms. For years landlord and agent may have had their eye on this

opportunity of letting the land at a better profit. The son may be known to be an indifferent farmer, and the rent will probably be often in arrear. But if he wants it, in nine cases out of ten it will be given to him, and the Squire will be glad to let him have it. Will the Jew do this, or the Gentile either, in most of the professions that men engage in? For if business were conducted in this spirit, usury would be at a standstill, and lawyers would starve. The poor improvident Philistine of a Squire has a code of his own that no one else cares to copy. In truth, the business of the country gentleman is the only secular one in which the main chance has not been usually the prime concern. For the average landlord has behaved more like a patriarch than as owner or employer to those on his estate. Their contentment has been his peculiar care, and whenever it has been brought to his notice that their peace of mind and the interests of his own pocket were in mutual antagonism, the latter has nearly always had to give way. It is not that he is a particular hero, for he may be hot-tempered and obstinate, conventional, and narrow-minded. He may have a full share of the faults of men. But he has been bred in the tradition, which has become a second nature, that if those who get their livelihood from his estate are not actually his kith and kin, yet in all those transactions with him which affect their daily lives they have an indefeasible claim upon him as the descendant of his sires. He is the representative of a dying system, and their interests are his.

All this, however, is but a portion of the activities of the Squire and his family. His wife and daughters

will know the wives and children of all the men on the estate, visiting them in illness and other adversity, and being familiar with their history, their troubles, and their needs. In fact, the influence of his women-folk is felt through all his little territory and sometimes far beyond it. They set the tone of upright conduct, of refined feelings, and decent behaviour, and have done much in the past to soften the asperities of those about them. The very fact of there being, as it were, a little resident Court, a family of superior fortune and position living in their midst, has created an example, a goal even to be striven for by young ambition. Disinterested counsel has been at their very door for the asking, advice has been freely sought and taken, help readily afforded at critical junctures, and a mutual sympathy has grown up, showing itself in all the manifold vicissitudes of existence. There has been a long interchange of friendliness, a looking up and a stepping down, until those above and those below have met at a common level, feeling that they understood one another, while both sides have benefited by each other's confidence. It led to an improvement of manners and morals, which are among the best fruits of civilization, and envy and class hatred were unable to flourish in such a soil.

In spite of all this, the day of the Squire is over. He is going for good, and nothing can save him. Never again shall we see this same semi-feudal family life—a community more or less dependent on one another—that has been so characteristic a feature of our country-side. The times, it is true, are unsuited to it, and it is too frequent a failing to extol a former

age at the expense of the present. Landed property is being more and more distributed among the various classes, the shares of individuals in opportunities for self-advancement are becoming more equal; and there is a nearer approach to a general norm of greater domestic comfort. The teaching of the schools has penetrated through all the strata. In short, the result has been to leaven the mass of the population with an infusion of culture, to give them more of the amenities of life, a larger influence upon the course of events, and more leisure. As a consequence, there is less concentration of all four in any particular grade or quarter. The quality of the whole has appreciated, for the conditions of improvement are more dispersed. But what the whole has gained, the parts have lost in quality. In the future, therefore, there will not be the same opportunity in the rural districts of learning from fine exemplars, nor the same advantage which accrues to the members of a small community when a higher standard than their own is in everyday relation with them and continually before their eyes. This is the loss which has resulted from the disappearance of the old régime. That it is greater than the gain who will say, for the progress of humanity is ceaseless and upward. The evolution of man takes no account of details, and has no concern with Squires or any other personages. New processes will more than compensate for the losses of the past. But to some of those now living who are old enough to have seen the country gentleman at work and at play, to have known him the centre of his little world—to them it will seem that something honour-

able and picturesque has been abstracted from the life of the people, an influence human and protective, a disinterested personal relationship, which we shall find it difficult to make up for through the coming years in all the modern experiments for our government and welfare.

IV

THE AGRICULTURAL SHOW

IN our part of the world there is an agricultural show every summer. It is a great event, perhaps the chiefest of the year, for it is made the excuse for many delights quite extraneous to the main purpose, such as love-making, gambling, and social intercourse. It is discussed for months beforehand, and for weeks afterwards every feature of it is recalled. All classes of the community are interested—the farmer and the squire, the caterer, the gardener, the dairyman and baker, the nurseryman and seedsman, the cattleman and shepherd, the dealers in agricultural machinery and garden requisites, the horticulturist and florist, the cheesemonger, the bee-keeper, the hunting-man and dog-fancier, the poultryman, the swineherd. But it is useless to try to make a list, for it is endless. The shops of the neighbouring town close early, and every car and charabanc for miles round is requisitioned. It sometimes pelts with rain, but this year it was exceptionally fine. Indeed, it was a lovely summer's day, and the stretch of English country, where the show was held, was looking its best. The scene was laid in a vast amphitheatre surrounded by hills clothed in wood, the pheasant preserves of that great nobleman and Lord Lieutenant of the County, the Duke

of Garth. There must have been twenty thousand people gathered there, pushing, sweating, gesticulating, gazing, drinking, chatting, shouting, pondering, courting, laughing, swearing, or resting.

The agricultural show is the homage of man to the harvest of the Earth. The heroine of the day is the bountiful English soil, the rich loam, brown and red, that has given birth to and nourished every plant and fruit and flower to be seen, that has fattened with its crops every beast and bird on view. What a patient, wonderful mother she is, this fecund English soil, deep and fragrant with her thick turf and wealth of many grasses! How old she is, but untiring, the mother and sustainer of all the men and women collected there to do her honour. Just as the calf or kid seizes upon the udder of its dam, or a child the breast of its parent, so do men pounce upon this golden earth and wrench their living from it, their very sustenance and nutriment. No wonder they take pride in the fruits of their labours. Many of these are beautiful, some indispensable, nearly all of them valuable, giving pleasure or special service to the community at large.

Every village for miles round had sent its human contingent that afternoon, for each had its exhibitor and every exhibitor his champions and his friends. The police had all they could do to keep the narrow roads clear for the traffic and the traffic from impeding the streams of pedestrians. The Railway Company had arranged special trains for excursionists at a distance, and hundreds of motor vehicles carried the rest. Eagerness was depicted on every countenance. Some hoped to sell goods,

others to buy, while not a few expected to reap honour. Many had come for the sheer joy of the holiday or to suck other people's brains, while a small section of the crowd were there to relieve the rest of any spare cash they might happen to be carrying. One man was standing by a tall weighing-machine, inviting the passers-by to try their luck. You paid twopence and the owner of the mechanism guessed your weight. You then stepped on, and if he were not within four pounds of the correct figure, you received a souvenir—a gilt ring of incredibly base metal. He was a quaint character and his method highly diverting. If his victim were a woman, he would place his hand on her shoulder in paternal fashion to guide her into the proper position facing the machine, and then, with an atrocious leer at the rest of the crowd, would, as it were casually and almost accidentally, let his hand drop behind and sweep swiftly over the more fundamental portions of her anatomy. The woman herself was unconscious of the manoeuvre, but not so the onlookers, who were always delighted. It gave his reckoning a solid foundation to build upon, for the chief mass of the human body is centred in those regions, and from their ascertained size the approximate load could be worked out. In the case of a man, the method was singular and original. The exponent of this exact science, facing the candidate, would place his hand behind the fellow's legs and rapidly feel one of his calves. The result was astonishing. In eight cases out of ten he would guess within two or three pounds, in several would hit the exact weight, and the only considerable margin of error

he was guilty of was when a small child came forward. Whenever I happen now to pass a weighing-machine, I seem to feel the pressure of a hand on the calf of my leg and to hear a voice singing out—'Try your luck with breezy Joe!'

In different parts of the ground other adventurers were essaying to pluck these country pigeons. Some were entertaining in their rascality, others merely barefaced. I shall not readily forget one of them who had chosen a pitch a little removed from the main streams of circulation. He was a tall, lantern-jawed, sallow-faced fellow in a black frock-coat, with a small consumptive-looking boy as assistant. A large bag was in front of him, packed with slender, shining rods of bent metal, identical in shape and size, wrapped each of them in tissue-paper. There was also a smaller case containing pill-boxes. For a long while it was impossible to discover what he was driving at. He spoke in general terms of the ills that man was subject to in later life, of the pain he suffered, of the necessity there was for him to seek advice in time, of the danger of procrastination, of the risks of premature death. Occasionally, but without referring to it in words, he would unwrap one of the parcels of tissue-paper, as it were absent-mindedly, and, talking all the time, turn the bent tube over in his hands, and then wrap it up once more, replacing it in the bag. He invited those about him to have confidence in him. The value of his advice had been vouched for by the highest medical authorities. He was no humbug; he had seen too much. His heart melted when he thought of some of the poor victims he had known; and it

was his duty to keep nothing back that his studies had revealed to him. For half a crown he would help them to easier ways and better health; and as he said this, he unwrapped another parcel and gave its contents to the boy to hold. Never once did he describe the affliction he was offering to alleviate nor did he specifically mention the articles he wished to sell. But his business was now clear, and his wares, for those likely to be interested, recognizable. One or two elderly people had gone close up to him, others stood further off, but were drinking in every word. Some were gazing at him wistfully, with sad, serious faces, anxious faces, one with an expression of dread and hopelessness upon it. 'The sallow-faced man got many half-crowns that day. There was a large heap of them on a newspaper in front of him, before I left. Presumably it was from a show of delicacy that he refrained from particularizing his wares, and partly, maybe, from the fear of prosecution for selling under false pretences. He was a blot upon the joy of the day in that corner of the ground, preying upon troubles that, but for him, on this festive afternoon, might have been forgotten for a little while.

What marvels of growth could be seen in the tents! —giant cauliflowers in tightly-packed rows, with faces of whitest wax; leeks as big as horses' tails; onions as heavy as bowls; great round beet; garden turnips with firm flesh and smooth, white skins; monstrous carrots the same size to half-an-inch; toothsome beans, peas, and marrows; red and yellow tomatoes, bursting with juicy seed; mammoth potatoes, ruddy, buff, and creamy-white; cucumbers

as thick as a lad's arm—the whole vegetable kingdom. And outside were the meats they were to garnish, the mutton, pork, and lordly beef. There was the Berkshire pig, the large white, and the middle-white. One huge black hog had won a first prize. He was stretched at full length and filled the whole of his pen from side to side. So vast was he, so mountainous a heap of rolling fat, it seemed as though he would never be able to get up again upon those puny little legs. His body had been oiled until it shone like polished ebony, and he lay and panted beneath the wondering stare of a hundred eyes. What plates of pork he represented with crisp, delicious crackling; what sizzling rashers of bacon; what immense slices of ham of whitest fat and pinkest lean! You feasted your senses upon him and your mouth watered as you gazed upon his bulk. The sheep, too, made you hungry as you looked at them. They were of every size and almost every colour. Their wool glistened with grease. Deep and compact it grew upon their backs, broad as tables, as they stood patiently, some of them dyed a bright orange, crowded between the hurdles. What mutton was there, legs and saddles, generous slices that would make the joint gape and gape again, running over with red gravy, on noble dishes, with floury potatoes and chunks of home-made bread!

But the best of all was the prime beef of England. There they waited, the great cattle, with their stupendous shoulders and silken flanks. There was one huge fellow weighing well over a ton. With a single butt of his granite brow, he could have

carried away the flimsy post and stakes that penned him in. Luckily he was ignorant of his power. His depth of rib was prodigious, his breadth of chest enormous, the solid mass of him almost terrifying. Yet with all this mighty strength he was beautiful, with a hide like satin, the muscles rippling beneath it in liquid waves. He stood almost still, chewing the cud, sometimes lashing his tail, while the flies settled upon his face, many hundredweights of solid beef, in the prime, enough to feed a thousand households—sirloins, ribs, succulent steaks and fillets, to be eaten between deep draughts of English ale. No wonder men stood about him, this monarch of the board, reflectively and with profound admiration in their eyes.

Then there were the cheeses, first, second, and third prizes, tunnelled where the judges had tested their quality; platters of yellow butter fresh from the churn; new-laid eggs, brown, cream, and white; rows of home-made wheaten bread; pots of honey, clear and granulated, from the lime-tree and the heather, from cottage gardens and scores of little homesteads. To every part of the country would this food go, and so fine was it, so pure and rich and wholesome, that further orders would follow, bringing money into the district and employing the labour of countless families. This had been pointed out earlier in the day at the farmers' luncheon held in a large marquee at one end of the ground. Colonel Tom Goswell, Chairman of the Agricultural Society, voiced the opinion of all present. 'He had not missed a show, as they knew, for the last fifteen years, since he had had the honour of being their

Chairman (hear, hear). From small beginnings they had grown to what they now were—one of the most progressive agricultural bodies in the Kingdom (cheers). The attendance this year, if the evening gate came up to expectations, promised to surpass all previous records. He would be failing in his duty if he omitted to mention that a large part of their success was due to the interest shown by His Grace, who this year had won the first prize for a middle-white sow (cheers). With goodwill and mutual help there was no limit to what might be attained in the future. The pig entries had been rather backward in the past, but with cheaper feeding-stuffs he hoped that this would be remedied, and he was authorized to say that Mrs. Goswell would be very pleased to present a cup next year for the best Berkshire litter (loud cheers and a voice, "Bravo, Mrs. Tom"). He must not detain them any longer ("Go on, sir"). The bantams had still to be judged. But they might take it from him that he would use every effort to make the yearly show a success, for it would not only attract money to the district and lead to additional employment, but confer considerable prestige upon them all.' (Prolonged cheering, the whole company rising and singing 'For he's a jolly good fellow.')

It was now the middle of the afternoon and the sports were taking place opposite a grandstand packed with ticket-holders. A regimental band was marching past and His Grace was watching it with tired eyes. He had had a worrying morning with his agent. Repairs had been extra heavy, and rents were in arrear. His son had just married a

penniless girl, and for some years he had been living on his capital. Most of the timber ready for felling had already been sold, also all the land ripe for building, his best pictures, and the cream of his plate and library. His town house had gone too, and the place in Scotland. As he looked round at the circling woods, his woods, he wondered how long they would so remain. The social system, as he had known it, was crumbling fast. He could feel it giving way under him. He knew that it was only a matter of time when this great domain that he had inherited would shrink to a mere fraction of itself. He remembered the days of his father's magnificence and compared them with his own. What would his son's be like? There was a cattle-man, one of his tenants, said to be worth a million. Was it after all impossible that one of these days that fellow's descendants might be sitting in the castle on the other side of the hill? No estate, no fortune, however splendid, could stand such taxation. The House of Peers too was impotent, and might be abolished at any moment. His dukedom was nothing but a responsibility and burden from the rising of the sun to its going down; his life a succession of exacting and boring duties. How he longed to be a small man for a space, free of his time, unobserved, at peace! This band was overdoing it; would it never stop marching? How badly he wanted to go home and, alone in his study, to sit with his head in his hand and rest!

Meanwhile the crowds were getting thicker, for the entrance fee had now dropped to a shilling. The poultry and dog exhibits seemed to be the chief

attractions now. The dogs had been there all day and were tired out. Their owners, many of them women, were dead beat too, for they had sat, perched on the edges of the little stalls, watching over their charges, like mothers over their children, all the time. Dogs there were of every common kind and size for the protection and companionship of man. A pungent smell pervaded the tent and hung like a blanket round it for several yards. There seemed to be a concentration of purpose in the faces of the guardians of these animals, a suspicious, jealous look, as they sat alongside one another, sharing their sandwiches with their pets. Many of the women looked like spinsters with no offspring of their own, lonely women, unattractive, soured, with flat chests and large bony hands, lavishing all the affection they had to give upon these dumb creatures, who in return, no doubt, adored the lineaments and worshipped the touch of these ministering angels.

A whole side of the show-ground was devoted to farming and garden implements, novel contraptions, the results of many hours of thought and experiment, examples of the patient ingenuity of man—weed-extractors, lawn-mowers, fountains, sprayers, iron and wooden gates, fencing, forcing-frames, incubators, fowl-houses, churns, separators, mangles, hay-sweeps, binders, chaff-cutters, labour-saving devices of every kind. And near by were the forges, where horseshoe and welding competitions were in full swing, the sharp ringing of the hammers on the anvils dominating all other noises near them.

There was still much to see, but I had had enough,

and turned to leave. The cheap-jacks seemed to be busier than ever. One man was selling envelopes, in each of which he had been observed to place a watch and pound note, for a shilling apiece. He was honest, so he claimed, and had not come there to cheat anyone. He wanted to deal with everybody fairly. They all knew Bowler Bob, and could find him again to-morrow at Chichester, if they went. No one could say that he had ever robbed a customer. If they weren't satisfied with their bargain, he would leave his home address and they could get their money back. He spoke with a loud, penetrating voice, and I handed him up a shilling. 'Here's a gentleman with enterprise,' he shouted. 'Now look here, sir, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll give you three shillings for your envelope. No? Well, I'll give you four shillings. Listen to this, ladies and gentlemen! I'm offering this gentleman, who is a sportsman, four shillings for his envelope, and he won't take it. That's a fair gamble, isn't it?' It was just possible, so I argued to myself, that one of the envelopes really did contain a pound note, and so I took the chance and refused the offer. But I was old enough to have known better and at any rate sufficiently prudent to open my purchase where there was nobody about to note its contents and to mock.

Outside the ground there were cripples waiting to waylay you; men with one leg only; men with no legs; a man with his face half eaten away, playing a flute; a death's-head of a fellow with a metal plate let into his skull strumming on a harmonium; hunchbacks selling balloons, blind men, verminous gipsies, twisted shapes, all the riff-raff and misery

that hang upon the skirts of a great festival. As I moved off in a car, the regimental band was playing with a will—‘I want to be happy all the time’—and I thought of the Duke sitting alone in his study.

V

THE LEGER

MANY a time have I been on Epsom Downs, Newmarket Heath, and the Knavesmire, to say nothing of Ascot, Goodwood, Sandown, and various other courses, losing money more frequently than making it, yet enjoying every minute of the surge, shouting, eye-strain, neck-craning, suspense, hustling, and thunder of hoofs. But give me the Town Moor for the real racing crowd, for sheer enjoyment of the sport, undeflected by ulterior issues. You go to the Downs for a beano, to the Heath, maybe, to watch the gallops or talk to the stables, to the Knavesmire to meet your friends, to Ascot to see the dresses, to Goodwood to finish the London season, to Sandown because it happens to be so near town. But you post off to the Moor to see the racing and nothing but the racing, to talk of nothing and think of nothing else. The Doncaster, or rather the Leger crowd, is the best-informed racing assembly in the world. The form of the horses, the habits of the trainers, the record of the jockeys, the luck of the owners, the state of the course, the chances of a local win—all these are better known, more deeply studied, more discussed by a larger proportion of those who attend, than at any other meeting in England, Scotland, Ireland or Wales. Have you

ever heard a Leger roar? If not, you do not know how a vast multitude of close on half a million can shout. It is almost a feral sound, growing gradually in volume, rolling in upon you with menace, like a storm, until it bursts in a terrific clap of thunder near the judge's box.

On the Downs, it is true, you get a still huger concourse, nearly twice the size, but what a difference is there? Every description of entertainment and sideshow is in progress all the while. Roundabouts, Salvation Army bands, coco-nut shies, tub-thumpers, religious fanatics, punch-and-judy shows, picnic parties, caravans, encampments, are scattered all over the ground. The whole place is like a fair. It is a public holiday, and every small tradesman near London, every little business-man, every coster, loafer, and hanger-on, every forked radish of a man, with any wife, fiancée, daughters, sons, aunts, and children-in-arms, from North, South, East, and West, who can walk, crawl, ride, drive, or be carried, is off there, if he can. What horses are running matters not so much. It is a national festival, a day in the open, a huge slice of life, with a bob or two on for luck. What a contrast to the Doncaster crowd! Have you ever watched the sea of set faces, thousands on thousands, hundreds of thousands, all turned the same way; or noticed the serried ranks, the sloping ground in front of the stands plastered with them—not a yard of space for anything but tightly wedged human bodies? For weeks beforehand many a lonely pub has been visited by a bookie, and a look-out kept in the road outside for any police who might stroll that way. The

chances of every horse have been canvassed and every family has its own opinion. There is perhaps a local horse much fancied, and those who come from afar make it their first business on alighting at the Moor to find out what the Doncaster people think. If it is heavy going, the local fancy will win. If the ground is hard, he won't, for he is a bit of a mud-lark and can pound along untired while other horses are dropping out. Hope springs eternal in the human breast, for the local favourite is rarely in the first three.

To enjoy the Leger, therefore, you must inbreathe the spirit of the Moor and understand the heart of the crowd. You must try to be a Yorkshire man, a native of the Midlands, for the Leger day. You must live through, in imagination, all those weeks of concentrated thought and study, of computation and calculation, that have preceded the great event. You must try to realize the quiet persistence, the unalterable resolution of those who get away for it—plans made weeks ahead and held to unflinchingly in the face of perverse difficulty. Lastly, you must savour the dogged determination of the crowd not to miss any aspect or incident of the race, their quickness to appraise the different starters, to mark the colours and to follow the fluctuation of the odds from moment to moment. It is not so much a holiday for this great gathering as a rite, and, having performed it, they return to their homes to wait for another year until it comes round again.

The race for the St. Leger stakes is one of the oldest in the calendar, for it was first run over a

hundred and fifty years ago, when the Marquis of Rockingham won it with his horse, Sampson. It is also one of the five celebrated classics and only a step removed from the blue ribbon of the Turf. He who wins it, moreover, not only pockets the stakes worth, as a rule, about twelve thousand pounds, but secures a steady income for several years of a good many additional thousands from stud fees. What owner, therefore, would not wish to reap so coveted a harvest and so much fame? What trainer would not strive to add this chaplet to his other laurels? What jockey not do his utmost to inscribe the triumph on his roll of honour? And what horse would not be conscious of the importance of the occasion, of the excitement all around him, and sense a little of the glory of which he is the fount?

It is the morning of the fateful day. During the night there was a heavy shower, but a breeze has sprung up and is drying up the moisture. It will be grand going and the sun is coming out. The newspapers have vied with one another in tendering good advice—learned articles, disinterring the winners of the last half-century, with solemn precepts to be wary; cautious prognostications based on experience; confident forecasts bred of old success; shrewd, fatherly counsel, providing wide margins of safety; exceptional hints from a man who seems to have fed out of the same rack and slept with a horse in the same box for the last fortnight; mysterious injunctions without much comment from persons whose identity has to be concealed, so delicate and highly confidential is the business of a

tipster; snappy instructions from 'one in the know.' This year there is a pronounced favourite, but he has a couple of dangerous rivals who may snatch the guerdon at the last moment. For by September the form of every horse is known to the experts, and their speed and staying power can be judged to a nicety. It is agreed that the favourite can stay the distance, that he has the necessary stamina and something to spare; but has he quite recovered his fitness after that spell of coughing earlier in the season? It is thought so by the best authorities. And the ground is not too soft, for he hates mud above all things, so fastidious is he on those exquisite slender legs. The jockey, too, is one of the cleverest available, and will be on good terms with his mount, and there is a strong rumour, contradicted last week, then re-established, then again discredited, then once more re-affirmed, that his trainer has a bet on him of a thousand pounds each way.

The crowd on the way to the course seems bigger than ever this year. The motor cars are smaller and larger too—tiny two-seaters and cars like juggernauts, holding fifteen to twenty families; cars of every rank and hue—the noisy rattle-box with all its paint off, packed with six fat men in greasy caps; the gliding, noiseless, brilliant saloon, with Beauty cushioned on resilient springs. The whole of Doncaster has turned out. If you wanted to hire a house, buy a saucepan or pearl necklace, have a tooth out, consult a solicitor, you could not do it nor get it done in the town this afternoon. It might even be tactless to go to the church for spiritual advice. The shops are shuttered. No business can be done

outside eating, drinking, smoking or wagering. Even the Mayor and Corporation have caught the fever and left the mace behind them. The roads for many hundreds of yards are almost impassable. Nobody looks where he is going; he is just carried along with the human tide. The eye is intent, but far away, gazing at a distant object two hours off, entering the straight, galloping like mad, flashing past the post. But no one can be run over here, however blind to things about him, for the pace is a snail's, so dense the traffic. It is like a vast army going into action. All the windows of the street down which it is pouring are lined with spectators—housemaids, cooks, chars, landladies, old men and women, small children, speeding the army on its way, greedily observing all the features of this living torrent. There is a long balcony overlooking the thoroughfare not far from the stands, belonging to a hostel for the deaf and dumb, with a hundred and fifty inmates, who, from their birth, have never spoken nor heard a sound. They are boys and girls with a life-long sentence of silence stretching ahead. There they stand, herded against the railings, in charge of white-capped sisters, waving their arms to the passing throng, excited, mute, and unhearing. It is one of the gala days of the year for them, this day of hurly-burly, when the air is palpitating with noise, and with eager hands they catch the pence that are tossed up. For them it is a soundless pantomime, and we gaze at them and they stare at us like beings in two different worlds.

There is hardly room to move in the paddock before the great race. The crowd is six deep round

the rails where the horses are being led. One by one they emerge from the stables and enter the ring, some of them followed by admirers and speculators of varying degrees of respectability and fortune. The favourite makes his appearance last, escorted by a still larger following. What a concourse of people! Young Roman Catholic priests from Ireland, well-fed, ruddy fellows, dozens of them, in clerical attire, owners, trainers, stewards, jockeys, stable-lads, the occupants of the stands, all those in fact who wish to see the horses at close quarters and can afford to pay the paddock fee. In one corner there is a booth, where only champagne is sold, and it is full—men and women, packed like pilchards, with flushed faces, drinking out of tumblers, toasting each other, toasting the favourite, nerving themselves for the ordeal of the next half-hour. Hard by is a telegraph office with messages speeding along the wires to bookmakers scattered all over the kingdom, wagers that will break some of their clients if they are lost. The numbers are all up; the runners are now definitely known, and the multitude in the paddock disperse once more to their respective points of vantage. Fourteen horses will canter to the start—Gay Muffin, Ballyhooly, Strawberry Jam, Keepsake, Ariel, Potboy, Bride of Abydos, Fancy Free, Tartar (the favourite), Usufruct, Sweetmeat, Rattlesnake, Jack-o'-Lantern, and Kiss-me-Quick. Tartar looked well in the paddock, giving complete satisfaction to his backers, but so did Potboy and Rattlesnake, the twofold danger he has to meet. The bookies are becoming more vociferous—'Six to one bar three—four to one Tartar, five to one

Potboy, five to one Rattlesnake, eight to one Ballyhooly, ten to one Fancy Free, twelve to one Usufruct, twenty to one Ariel.' A man, with a voice like a fog-horn and only one eye, is shouting at a middle-aged couple who are arguing with him. 'I tell you, you can't have sixes. Where do you come from, Darby and Joan? Sixes can't be got in Doncaster to-day. You'd better go and play ping-pong. What? Someone told you they got sixes? I tell you, you can't have sixes. Now, look here, I'm sick of you both. I'll put Lord Lonsdale on to you, if you don't take care. Sixes indeed! You want to rob us. Cheating, I call it, nothing else. Eight to one Ballyhooly, five to one Potboy.' And so the noise continues. Bluff, suasion, importunity, insolence, cajolery, even flattery, combine to make it in the absence of the Tote one of the richest harvests the Ring has ever had.

The parade will take place in a moment, and the last remaining chances of backing your choice will soon be gone. From a far corner of the paddock the competitors issue, one by one, in the order of their position on the card. A hush of expectancy falls upon the crowd as they enter the course; the bookies are almost silent; even the tick-tack men on the roof out there are taking a look. How proud these horses are! The earth is scarcely good enough for these princes, and they know it, picking their feet up and putting them down as though they were conferring a favour on the soil. What care has been expended upon them, what fortunes in gold; what anxious days passed, what deliberations held in secret, what speculative surmise indulged in! Each

of them is the darling of a host of friends, the cynosure to-day of nearly a million eyes. Some of them carry the hopes of a stable, others of a county, a few of a population almost equal to that of a large city. One of them is going to be the winner, one of the fourteen. Is he aware of it? Has he a sense of things to come that we have not? Are any of them resolved to do their best, irrespective of jockeys, to make manifest what they are made of, these heirs of famous blood, descendants of great sires, before this vast assemblage? Tartar is showing off, dancing sideways, an embodiment of grace and conscious beauty. What a string of lovely creatures, the aristocracy of the Turf, displaying in every movement their breeding and their race! They have now turned and are cantering to the gate. With what consummate ease and freedom of limb two of them especially are going, Tartar and Rattlesnake; and there is a third, hitherto unnoticed, with a long, unhurried, fluent stride, Jack-o'-Lantern, who is last but one.

They are now at the gate and the starter is doing his best to marshal them into line. He has a restive lot to deal with and it is already a quarter-past-three. Ariel is all over the place; Tartar has quietened down; Fancy Free has her head the wrong way. Now they are becoming steadier and moving up. Off! They are off at last and two have been left behind. No! it was a false start and back they come to range themselves once more. It is twenty minutes past three, and they are still mixed up. Ariel and Fancy Free are behaving better. They are now all moving forward in splendid line. Off!

They really are off this time. The bell rings, the race has begun. About a mile and six furlongs they have to gallop, describing a great arc until they get into the straight. They are out of sight for a moment. Now they are reaching the first bend. Fancy Free is first, Potboy second, Tartar third; Rattlesnake and Usufruct have dropped behind. Round the top of the loop they sweep at a tremendous pace. Tartar with his green cap is now lying second; Fancy Free is still in front; Sweetmeat is fourth; Potboy fifth. Into the straight they gallop. Tartar is now on the rails and just leading; Fancy Free is beaten. Sweetmeat has moved up to second; Potboy third; Ballyhooly fourth, but all close together. What a race! There is a yellow cap coming up from behind. Potboy has been shut out. Sweetmeat is now neck and neck with Tartar, Ballyhooly third, and the yellow cap fourth. Ah! the yellow cap is Jack-o'-Lantern. Tartar has now got his head in front, and Billy Pellew is using his whip. 'Come on, you bloody fool,' shouts a man in front of me. 'Come on, Tartar!' Sweetmeat has dropped to third; Ballyhooly is out of it; Jack-o'-Lantern is second. My God, what a race! 'Tartar wins,' yell the crowd. There is a vast roar from a hundred thousand throats—'Tartar'—'the Favourite'—someone has knocked my hat off and is waving his arm like a maniac. Jack-o'-Lantern is now abreast of Tartar. Blood seems to be surging in one's eyes, ears, and nose. A woman is shrieking just behind me in a high-pitched voice: 'You're breaking my arm, damn you!' It is a deadheat. No! Jack-o'-Lantern pushed his nose in front at the last moment

as he passed the post and has won by a short head. Up go the numbers, 13, 9, 11. The tension is over, the strain is past, and the waters of disillusion ebb and flow over the huge assembly which relaxes and disperses in all directions.

The great race has come and gone. Another year and yet another crowd will assemble—somewhat different in composition, but still the same—earnest, hopeful, dogged, improvident. Thousands will have died or become bed-ridden, but thousands more will take their place. Then a few additional years and not a single survivor from this Leger will be left. The vast concourse will be of another generation,⁴ but again always the same, with the same instincts, hereditary, ineradicable, national. The experience of their fathers will have taught them nothing. They will believe ingenuously that they can win against the odds. They will throw away their savings and continue to do so, obstinately convinced that it is a ritual which should not be omitted and that one day they will make a profit. The horses too will be the same—the same noble breed, the same illustrious strain, the blood of the race coursing in their veins; the same spirit, inherited from famous sires, to inspire them; the same high courage to sustain them; the same speed and endurance to win them the victory over lesser rivals; and the same beauty to make them a wonder and delight for every eye that haps upon them. The British Constitution, perhaps, will have altered, but the man and the horse will be the same.

VI

OLD RETAINERS

HAD I but leisure to write a description of things that have been, I would choose the distant years of boyhood when I lived in the country amid quiet, epichorial scenes, surrounded by those who had worked for my family nearly all their lives. For a new epoch has begun, and the hour is fast approaching, as country estates are sold and broken up, when the old retainer, as we used to know and love him, will be no more seen. Indeed, he belongs to the Present not at all. Events are moving too quickly for him. He required in those who employed him a certain stability of fortune and circumstance. To be able to look back upon thirty years or so of faithful service and still forward in the same environment of financial security and social equilibrium, was indispensable to the rôle he played. To-day, however, nothing can be predicted with even reasonable probability more than a year or two ahead, and the last decade has been of so troublous and destructive a nature, that continuity of service has become the exception rather than the rule.

What memories the words 'old retainer' conjure up—of pride in the tradition of the Family, care for its interests, affection, loyalty, zeal. Of those I have known hardly one now survives. They are all dead,

buried in the crowded graveyard of our parish church. What inadequate memorials mark the spots where their bones lie!—a name and a couple of dates, and perhaps a text, or line or two of verse. Is this the ultimate testimony to so much devoted service? Is this all that can be recorded of you—Martha, Tappitt, Dougal, Clara, Anderson, Nanny, Old Sam? Is this the only tale to be told of all those years of fidelity and disinterested toil? For you were built of heroic mould—quarrelsome, some of you, jealous, tiresome, at times impossible even, yet with the holy flame of love and duty burning within you all, duty done in every weather, and love untarnished by a thought of gain.

‘You will be the death of me,’ I can recollect my mother saying, convulsed with laughter, to our old nurse, Harriet Ward, when she had perpetrated some terrific malapropism. Who can forget, who knew and loved her, that neat figure, four feet six in height, primly garbed in black? She lived to be eighty and was active almost to the end. Indomitable little woman! I can see you with your dark brown ‘toupet’ and rheumatic knuckles, deaf, and a little blind, courageously cheerful, obstinate, conventional, uncompromising. She loved only us children, with a fierce, maternal love, and lavished all the resources of her heart and strength upon our needs and frolics. Foreigners she detested and despised; the lower orders were dirt beneath her feet; the children of others inferior clay. Her little flame of life, that tiny lamp, fed by the oil of love, burnt for us and us alone. She lived with us for forty years, and for the last ten of them did small,

self-imposed chores about the house, occasionally grumbling and perverse, ceaselessly busy and sometimes in the way. To tidy things, to put them away, to wrap them up in camphor-laden drawers and boxes, trunks and cupboards, to take care of them for Master this or Miss that, and then utterly forget them, so that, if wanted at any time, they never could be found, was one of her chief occupations when she had ceased to be our nurse. Where she had been and in what exact capacity, before she came to us, we were never able finally to determine, although, as children, we plied her with shamelessly direct questions, and later on, more tactfully, would bring the conversation round to that undiscovered territory. But we never learnt anything definite of this shadowy past. Whatever her position may have been—and we gravely suspected from the slight look of discomfort in her face, when we spoke of it, that it may have been something very lowly—no autocrat could have brushed aside the opinions of others with more contempt, no judge of the High Court shown more inflexibility of purpose and character and comported himself with greater dignity than this four feet and a half of domineering spinsterhood. To us she was as indulgent as a fairy godmother, but of the other domestics had scarcely a good word to say. They were idle and inefficient, all but the cook, and, had it not been for her own eternal vigilance, nothing, according to her, would ever have been done to time or even done at all. They laughed at her behind her back, were irritated at times, but could not help respecting her. As for us, we bullied and adored her. I remember her

funeral. The coffin was as small as a little child's. Two men only bore it, and, as it was lowered into the ground, we stood and watched its disappearance, incredulous and misty-eyed, for it seemed to be the visible burial of all our early years.

I can see, too, a little, thick-set figure, bent double, weeding a garden path. It is Tappitt, the odd-man, who tends the cow and pigs, sees to the gas plant, heats the boiler for the house, feeds the dog, looks after the poultry, clears away the kitchen refuse, brings in the wood and coals, fetches the heavy goods from the station, minds the pony that mows the lawn, et cetera, et cetera; and is ever diligent, sweet-tempered and obliging, but a little serious withal, and thoughtful, as though he were ruminating some problem of life. All this he has done for close on fifty years, and is now an old man, beloved of everyone, and best of all by the beasts of the field. He will sit up all night with a sow that is going to litter or a cow that's expected to calve, not from necessity, but because he is irresistibly drawn to these inarticulate creatures, especially in their hours of crisis or suffering. They appeal to all that is tenderest in him. He is learned in the ways of pigs, all their idiosyncrasies and humours, forecasting their ailments, interpreting their grunts, anticipating their swinish needs. You should see the cow waiting to be milked, watching for the little man—he is barely five foot—and, when he arrives, looking at him out of her large, soft eyes with bovine but intimate understanding. I recollect his three nights' vigil when the life of our dog, Sweep, had been despaired of, nursing him like a mother. Another

time he took home a tame hare that was sick—his cottage was close to us in the Park—and kept it at his bedside for a whole week, coaxing it back to health and appetite. And yet he is a simple old fellow, with no education, able neither to read nor write, with no interests, seemingly, outside those of his daily tasks, and sparing of speech, although the best listener I have ever met. He belongs to the meek and humble of Earth. Six or seven years ago he fell off a stack and broke his leg, a compound fracture, owing to the gross carelessness of another who was working alongside; but he uttered no complaint, although he was cruelly hurt and took many months to recover. It was only on one occasion that I saw him deeply stirred. We were standing in the Park together on a broiling summer afternoon, when we noticed in the middle of the road that cut across it, and about fifty yards away, a small squatting body that looked like a rabbit. It turned out, however, on closer acquaintance to be—what do you think?—a fat, young dabchick! Up it got as we approached, and began at its utmost speed to make off in the direction of a pond several hundreds of yards distant. Every thirty seconds or so it would sink down exhausted in the dust, then, after resting a little, renew what appeared to be this race against time to achieve the watery element that was its home. Its progress was not so much a waddle as a fantastic and ungainly kind of jig, the legs jerking with frantic rapidity in all directions, a large part of the effort being quite ineffectual for the purpose of advancement, just as on the music-hall stage you sometimes see a trick

dancer running with all his might and yet remaining on the same spot. How, in Heaven's name, had this aquatic creature got there? How did it know in which direction to go, and was it its own native pond that it was making for? The parents were nowhere to be seen; there was no water within a couple of hundred yards or more; and there appeared to be no explanation why this callow fledgeling should be stranded on a dusty road so far from its natural element. Had a hawk or jackdaw seized it and then released it in flight? We could not divine the cause. The old man dropped his shovel and hurried towards it. This, however, frightened the little outcast, who made desperate attempts to get away and then sank once more to the ground exhausted. So we held a conference. Was it better to protect it from outside interference until it had gained the pond, or should we, at the risk of terrifying it still more, and perhaps doing it an injury, rescue it from its predicament and carry it to the water? Tappitt was in favour of the former course, and so we slowly followed the dabchick at a respectful distance, beholding its courageous but terrible exertions with ever greater wonder and pity. Our old friend, however, could soon endure it no longer, and with a sort of whimper ran ahead once more, took it tenderly in both hands and, bearing it carefully to the pond, deposited it by the water's edge. It was as fat as butter and its little belly swollen with food. Out it swam a couple of yards and then dived, then dived again, plunging and splashing in holiday mood, while we stood upon the bank rejoicing. Never had I seen at such close

quarters so consummate a performer amid obstructions of every kind—slimy, trailing weeds, bull-rushes, the dipping branches of an overhanging oak and water-lily leaves as big as plates. The little fellow, however, never hesitated for an instant, but, hedged about as he was on all sides, above and below water, dived and dived, navigating with effortless skill this jungle of entanglement and reappearing after long intervals many feet from where he started. Not soon either shall I forget the look of ecstasy upon the face of old Tappitt as we turned away. He is still with us, unloquacious as of yore, a shade more serious and a trifle weaker, but dogged at his work and devoted as ever to all his pets—the birds of the air and the beasts of the field.

One other old retainer I cannot but recall, now gathered to his Highland sires. He was a Scot, and in early manhood had been a gillie of my grandfather's, but had subsequently migrated south to be our gamekeeper in Sussex. From fourteen years of age he had been in our service and died in it in harness when close on seventy-five. Nobody knew who Dougal's parents were, for he was a foundling, abandoned by the side of a burn that babbled through a small glen on a well-known deer-forest. But as for myself and some others who were intimate with him, we never had a doubt that he was of gentle birth on one side of his parentage or the other. All his instincts, bearing and outlook bespoke an ancestry of knightly blood and honourable tradition. The deepest pleasure vouchsafed to me as a boy was ferreting rats or rabbits the livelong day with Dougal, with spade, nets, dog, and gun, or creeping

to the pond's edge and putting up a duck or teal, or sitting by a float waiting for a perch to bite. As I lay in bed at school, my last thoughts at night were the number of days or weeks when I should once again be with him in the hedgerows or the woods; and, before leaving after the holidays, I would pluck a piece of moss or break off a fragment of turf near the scene of my final outing with him, and treasure it as a visible particle of that heavenly world where life was almost more than bliss. In those days he regarded me with the affection of an elder brother, yet combined an ease of intercourse, and, at the same time, a recognition of our respective positions with a tact and charm I have never seen equalled. On one occasion there had been a violent scene at home, accusation and denial, and a sense of rank injustice at the treatment meted out. My feelings had been ploughed up and I rushed to my bedroom and packed a little case. The station was only five minutes from the house. On reaching London, I jumped into a cab, and after several hours' waiting found myself in an empty third-class carriage bound for the North. I was quit of the Past, deeply wronged, as I believed myself to be, and, with scarcely any money in my pocket, was taking my sore heart where I would see my kith no more. But hardly had I sunk into a corner when a well-known face appeared at the window. It was Dougal, clad neatly in a blue serge suit and with his kind eyes sorrowfully regarding me. He opened the door and came and sat opposite to me. Never had he been more respectful. Admiration, pity, love shone in his face. Complete comprehension was there of

all I had suffered, of the revolt, the despair, the ache, the silent rage. He begged me to go back with him, but not a word of blame was spoken; my parents were never referred to; the cause of it all ignored. He implored me for his own sake not to leave. There were tears in his eyes. The train had long since started. Over and over again I refused to turn back, told him I had business ahead, that I wanted to be alone and not to be bothered. But still he pleaded. There he sat, bending forward, with his rough hands resting on his knees and his eyes fixed on my face, almost sprucely dressed, and on the verge of a breakdown, recalling to my mind all the fun we had had together, all the joys that we still might have, if only I would turn back. It was the appeal of pure, unselfish affection and it broke my resistance and healed the wounds. I divined, too, how it was with him. He had been ordered to bring me back, *by force, if necessary*. Guessing my probable destination, he had had time to change, and, catching a later train from home, had raced across London. How could he use force against his little Master? It would have bruised his heart beyond repair, shattered all the Past, destroyed that perfect relationship between us, been such a shock as neither of us could have got over. As I sat there obdurate, listening to him, his terrible predicament came home to me. The rôles were reversed. I began to feel immeasurably sorry for him. I knew that I could not give him this pain, that, once force were used, our friendship and dear companionship would be at an end. I could see the struggle going on within him, his desperate efforts to soften my heart, and,

when we reached the next station, I got out. From that instant nothing was said of what had happened, plans were only made for the future. We laughed and jested, had a meal at the railway-station, and reached home late at night. But we were both conscious of how dire a crisis we had been through, and that the power of love alone had saved us. As I stood at his bedside forty years later, this scene came back to me. All the intervening period dropped away. He was no longer stretched helpless and dying, but as I used to know him when a boy. It was not forty years ago, but yesterday, and tomorrow we should again be hunting in the Elysian fields. Perhaps we shall.

Very soon, old retainers, as some of us recollect them, will be a type for curiosity or remembrance only. They are patently out of keeping with the present age. Deer-parks, spacious rooms, ancient manors, pheasant-coverts, home-farms, ornamental lakes and gardens, stables, and so forth, coupled with ample means and leisure in their employers, are the very essence of their picturesque existence. Where shall we look for these a generation hence? The stage is preparing, aye, is already cleared, for quite different actors who even now are chafing in the wings. These, in turn, may one day be regretted, their fashion superseded by a newer style. But the one faith at least to which we may pin our hope is this, that loyalty of service, whether to the one or to the many, will ever be revered as a holy thing, if the grace of love attend it and a worthy pride.

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VII
TRIALS

IF you are of the clubbable sort, a gregarious human animal, you like to turn into your club occasionally to meet the males of your own age and tastes, or, better still, with tastes and occupations so unlike your own, that every encounter with them is an adventure in itself. For a short space you can live their lives and adopt their interests, take part in their dangers, share their wealth and their luck, good or ill, without any of the accompanying disadvantages that attend their diverse fortunes. To sit at lunch next a man just back from stalking tigers, or who has founded a huge business, or is about to attend a critical Cabinet meeting, or is one of the Big Four at Scotland Yard—to lunch, I repeat, next one of these, or indeed, next anyone you know who has had experiences out of the common, is sauce to your meat and lends a touch of colour to your own less eventful career. Those who belong to Clubland are of infinite variety—bores, excruciating ones, to be avoided at all costs, and at times with preposterous difficulty; pleasant, easy fellows, who with a sentence or two will improve your humour for the day; eccentrics, crusty bachelors—settled in a permanent groove, who will only wash in one particular basin and sit in one particular

chair, who live the best part of the twenty-four hours in the Club, and may one day die in it; pathetically lonely members, with dyspepsia or unhappy homes, with bullying departmental chiefs, or, maybe, with scarcely enough to keep up appearances. Sometimes, when the wind is in a certain quarter, confidences will be exchanged in some far corner of a large room over a pipe or cup of coffee, and a man will unbend and unbosom himself of disillusionments that no one e'er has dreamed of.

Such a one of my own age I remember meeting years ago. For a long time we had not spoken to one another, except for a passing greeting, although I had known him since boyhood and had often seen him in the 'Wanderers.' He would sometimes sit in an angle of the library, facing the wall, without reading, sunk deep in a chair, with eyes shut and his finely cut features fixed and serious, his mind obviously occupied with thoughts none too happy. I used to wonder what he was thinking about. He would remain like that for an hour at a time, and then get up and leave the Club without looking at or speaking to anybody. Was he contemplating a change of religion or a resignation, or had he perhaps been jilted or lost money? But he never confided in anyone that I knew of. Then one day I found myself in a chair quite near him, with only a small table between us. We had the place to ourselves, for it was a Saturday afternoon and the Club was empty. We exchanged commonplaces, and I ordered some tea. I reminded him of the long years we had known one another and of the volume of water that had flowed under the bridge since first

we met. He responded in friendly fashion to my advances and proceeded to talk quite freely. We got on to the subject of London as compared with the country, of holidays, of leisure, of the world in general. Gradually he became more intimate, the ice of reserve melted, and he began to expound his philosophy of life. He had moved much in Society, had travelled a good deal, dabbled a little in literature, taken up various hobbies from time to time, but it had all ended in nothing, not even in matrimony. He had worked hard, too, for he was in one of the public Departments, and was pulling himself slowly up the ladder. A gnawing discontent, a feeling of unutterable weariness and distaste had crept into his life. What did all this toil and restlessness amount to? It was all artificial, every particle of it. The longer you remained a slave to it, the more your vitality and sincerity became sapped. Life was too brief a story merely for that. It was essential that a man should escape from it in time, unless he was prepared to lose his very soul. In these days, however, unless you made up your mind to shake the dust off the soles of your feet and leave the world you had hitherto known, it was almost impossible to get back to Nature, to live with her, untormented by the claims and clamour of the age, to be able to think out the problem of your existence, to be at peace. He had had enough of trimming his humour to people he despised and loathed, of all the parasitical snobberies of everyday intercourse, of swallowing tainted air, of the endless routine of his profession.

He was tired, so desperately tired of all the con-

ventions and unrealities, all the futilities that he had to take seriously. They meant nothing, came to nothing, and soon he would be an old man with only the graveyard in front of him. And as he said this, seeming now almost to be addressing himself, he flung out his hands in a gesture of revolt, exclaiming: 'I've finished with it!' Every individual, he continued, whom circumstances had made a serf, should emancipate himself before it was too late, slip the shackles, endure poverty rather than bonds, and this he was resolved to do, and his erstwhile kennel would know him no more. A man's worst enemy was generally himself. He might conquer his other adversaries, beat them underfoot, circumvent them, but against himself he was often powerless. Only in some deserted region could he grapple with this dreadful foe, where no other distractions would divert his attention from the supreme conflict. Alone with himself, he had more chance of trampling upon and crushing the life out of the devils that possessed him. It was often his only way out. Such a man must make up his mind to cut the painter, to escape from his environment, and live practically alone. Then, and then only, could he hope to be victorious, comparatively happy, and at last at peace.

I listened gravely and with sympathetic attention, but accepted this effusion with a private grain of salt, estimating at what I thought their proper value the momentary decisions sometimes come to when we are sorely tried, the resolves not to endure it any longer, to be quit of it all, to leave house and home one morning for ever, bringing the customary

routine to an abrupt close, assuming another name and style, and doffing our identity for good and all. I had heard it all before. In a few hours he would calm down, his normal habit of mind would reassert itself, and he would look back upon this outburst with chagrin and annoyance. I did not see him again, and heard shortly afterwards that he had gone to live abroad, when the whole incident of the conversation faded from my mind.

Fifteen years passed, when one day I happened to be present at some sheep-dog trials in the North of England. If you have never witnessed any such, you have missed, not merely an enjoyable event of the country-side, but one of the most fascinating exhibitions of animal sagacity the world has to show. Of all dogs in the land the sheep-dog is probably the faithfullest, and the most intelligent and useful. Without his aid the shepherd would lose many a straying sheep, and his labours would be increased tenfold. Indeed, without his dog he would be helpless in gathering the large flocks under his care. A good shepherd and a good dog are almost a single personality. They love and understand one another completely. Their object is the same. They are alone together for long stretches of time. They rest, work, and feed together. The dog is often the shepherd's only companion; the shepherd the only comrade the dog has. The good dog worships his master with a blind devotion and obedience, while many a shepherd would rather lose a couple of fingers than part with his tried and trusty friend. The dog knows when his master has something on his mind, when things have gone awry, and the

master when the dog is uneasy, although no stranger would notice it, and he looks around for coming trouble. In all weathers they are out together, night and day; there are no holidays, nor any separations till death or old age parts them. It is knowledge of this that imparts special interest to the trials. Dozens of dogs with their owners arrive on the scene from far and near. The shepherd may have concerns outside his canine friend on an occasion like this—the glory of winning a prize, the purchase of a second dog, the sale, maybe, of a young one, the meeting with other professionals; but the only one for the dog is his master's will and his approval or disapproval his only care.

The test is a severe one. A couple of hurdles, set a few feet apart, are fixed about four hundred yards from where the shepherd takes his stand, two similar pairs a little nearer to the right and left, and a small hurdled pen just in front of him. On a flag being waved, four sheep are driven from a quarter of a mile away behind the first pair of hurdles, and when they reach a certain post, the dog gets a signal and off he goes. His duty is to work round behind the sheep and drive them through this first pair. When this is accomplished, he has to chase them round his master and then back the other way through the hurdles to the left and across the ground through the ones to the right. He next has to divide the flock into two couples, then to pen it, and lastly to single out the sheep marked with a red ribbon and keep it apart from the others. During all the time that the trial is in progress he is acting upon the instructions of the shepherd. Every move is governed

by his master's whistle, and for each there is a separate note—a long-drawn-out blast for 'lie down,' others of different length and tone for 'right,' 'left,' 'slow,' 'fast,' 'rush,' 'straight,' and so on. An old, experienced dog will require much less guidance than a young one, and carry out the manoeuvres with scarcely any assistance. But the majority are dependent on the shepherd's signal and wait for every change of tactics until they have heard it.

It was as bonny a day in early September as you could wish for, and the moor was at its loveliest. Sometimes it is sullen, with leaden skies walling it in, or sinister, when a storm is brewing and black, menacing cloud-masses are charging across its face. And I have seen the winter gales thrashing and torturing the heather till it looked like the tresses on a Mænad's head. But on that afternoon the moor was a glowing sea of green and purple, wave upon wave and crest on crest. A torrent, rising in the high lands and leaping down the steep sides of a ravine, plunged through it, buffeting the boulders in its bed and tumbling and splashing through peat and bracken, and with many a cascade, till it reached the flatter country down below. It was an ideal spot for the trials, for some of the competitors came from rugged hill-sides and the broken character of the ground afforded the dogs a good opportunity of exhibiting their extraordinary skill. On a dark night the moor was well-nigh impassable for a stranger, so full of sharp rocks was it and unexpected pitfalls, and in places riven by deep clefts. Even in daytime after heavy rains, unless you picked your way carefully and watched your step, you might

easily find yourself up to the waist in ice-cold water in some peaty, heather-hidden hole, for the ling grew nearly to the knees, often concealing the treacherous ground that lay beneath. But what a pure, invigorating air it was that played over that expanse of purple flower, unsullied by the breath of cities and fresh in the mouth as a mountain spring!

A large crowd had gathered to witness the trials, and were assembled on some rising ground facing the edge of the moor where they were to take place. The competitors stood apart with their dogs, waiting for the summons from the judges' tent. There were dogs of varying size and colour, the majority of them small and somewhat slight of build, but with an alertness of mien that bespoke the keen intelligence behind it. The favourite hue seemed to be a mixture of black and white, a blend easily distinguishable even at a considerable distance. Nan, Meg, Jess, Nell, Douce, Jean, and Queen were there, as well as Lad, Sweep, Don, Toss, Tip, and Spot—famous champions some of them, others no doubt champions of the future; a few of them old, experienced, and composed, but exceedingly wary as they sat awaiting their turn; others younger and more restless, as their ordeal, perhaps their first public one, drew nearer. Their owners bided by them, not conversing much among themselves, intent upon the proceedings, watchful, critical, perhaps jealous; men from near and far, from the hills and plains, from sheltered farms and bleak uplands—farmers, shepherds, breeders, dog-fanciers. You could tell by the cut of their jib the kind of folk they were—the smart coat and gaiters, the stout serviceable leggings and decent

breech, the shabby coat and weatherbeaten hat. Some of them had an air of prosperity, self-satisfied citizens of the world; others were lean, hungry-looking, and detached, men accustomed to solitude and desolate spots, to harsh winds and torrid suns, to long travel and protracted vigils.

With what amazing intelligence and prompt obedience their dogs worked that afternoon! On the brow of the hill, in the distance against the horizon, the sheep would first be seen and the dog would make a vast circumferential sweep to get behind them without their catching sight of him, speeding away to the right or left, with belly low to the ground, as though he were off in an altogether different direction. Then he would gradually wheel in, completing the semicircle when well in their rear. Through the hurdles he would drive the poor, silly wights, covering the ground in an incredibly short space of time, and finishing the test by dividing off the beribboned sheep from the rest of the flock. This last manoeuvre is perhaps the cleverest of all. The sheep are huddled near the little pen and face the dog, while the shepherd stands by, pointing with his stick to the animal that has to be separated from the rest. The dog crouches within a few feet, fixing the marked sheep with venomous eyes and shifting his position with the flock as it moves round and round. Suddenly he dashes in and the former finds itself isolated from the rest, with the dog between. So swift, however, has the final movement been that, like a conjuring trick, the exact method of execution could not be detected. It is not possible to exaggerate the evil

concentration of expression on the dog's face during this part of the trials, nor the terrified look of the marked sheep. Some say, with what truth is a moot point, that the dog mesmerizes his victim, so that, when he darts in, the sheep for that brief instant is paralysed and left stranded when the others stampede. Whatever the means employed, the power and skill displayed by the dog are almost uncanny, dominating, as he does, the witless creature by sheer terror.

It was astonishing how slight a whistle could be heard by the dogs when they were yet a long distance off. The drawn-out signal was loud and emphatic, but the shorter, more delicate ones you would have regarded as incapable of distinction except by those quite near. Yet they were all heard and instantly obeyed. The dogs would drop like a stone hundreds of yards away or slowly creep along the ground, stalking their prey and crouching low. Or they would make a sudden rush and bark, or jump at a refractory sheep, taking care, however, never to bite it or tear the fleece. So many points would be allotted to a dog for each section of the trial, and marks were also allowed for the skill and behaviour of the owner himself. If there were overmuch whistling or shouting or touching of the sheep, points were forfeited, although the dog might have done his duty to perfection. On the other hand, too much bustling of the flock, too wild a chase, would also count against a dog and perhaps lose him the competition, although the time taken over the trial might have been better than any. What was required was a combination of speed, judgment,

determination, and sobriety, vast knowledge of the ovine temperament, and perfect collusion between him and his master.

It was towards the finish of the trials when the incident took place. A shepherd had taken up his position with his dog, 'Fate,' beside him. He was a lanky fellow, getting on in years and shabbily attired. As the test proceeded, it was evident that the dog was an old one and knew the business well, for his owner had very little signalling to do. I was standing near the judges' tent, somewhat apart from the rest of the crowd, and as the man passed me after the trial, he looked up. Never shall I forget it. He recognized me in a flash and I saw who he was. He dropped his stick and for a brief moment stared in my face. Then, flinging his hands out with a gesture of revolt, he recovered himself and disappeared into the tent. As for myself, I moved off to another part of the ground and watched the remainder of the trials with my thoughts far away. Next day I picked up a local paper. It gave a lengthy account of the proceedings and a list of the prize-winners, laying stress on the importance of encouraging these competitions and lauding the enterprise of some of the competitors, who had journeyed long distances to attend. One man, who had taken a second prize, had come all the way from some isolated uplands, having started at six o'clock on the morning of the previous day, travelling the whole time in order to be present. His name was Luke Wilde, a well-known shepherd of the locality, and the owner of 'Fate,' a dog that had done well on several other occasions.

So that was what my fellow-member at the 'Wanderers' had done, and his words on that Saturday afternoon fifteen years ago again came back to me. Was he contented and at last at peace? I pictured his life in that out-of-the-way corner of England, alone with his dog and his thoughts. . . .

It is a summer night and the stars are all about him, constellations beyond all guessing, distances beyond all human computation, and he can feel the plank he stands on, this little planet, whirling in the immensity, a speck of dust caught up in some terrific eddy and hurled along for æons unimaginable, for purposes utterly unknown. Sirius is there, that mighty orb of raging fire, transcending our own luminary as an arc-lamp a farthing rushlight, yet so far off, it seems but a glittering pin-point in the Universe. Yet what is it to others whose light has not yet reached us; and what are these to others still whose light will come too late, when Earth is shivered, worn away, burnt up, no more a member of the heavenly host? How quiet it is! There is not even a nightjar to break the stillness. How remote Clubland seems and all human fever, how trifling and unimportant! Yet how vast the intellect of man, reaching out beyond the stars towards the Infinite, winged and free, in the midst of this stupendous mechanism, self-conscious, godlike! I can see him with his dog, faithful companion in his exile. What has he lost, what gained? Has he overcome the old, inveterate enemy and trampled him underfoot? Has he shaken off the ancient tyrannies that used to oppress him? Is there nothing now he wants? Or is there perhaps some newer

thralldom, some yet deadlier foe, that he has met upon the hills and cannot escape from? Gradually, as I write this, his shape is becoming dimmer and fading from my sight. It is being swallowed up in the mists of things departed, and very soon of him and of 'Fate' there will be nothing left but the merest wisp of memory.

VIII

THE COW-PASTURE

A ROOM, a little field, a hill, a spinney, aye, even a single tree, may be the focusing point of what we know as 'home.' When we are leagues away, it is pictured in our thoughts. When back again in the well-remembered house it is the first object that we look for. Our youngest and most impressionable years have been spent in its company. It seems to know us more intimately than our parents do, for our faults are always forgiven and it indulges all our whims. In youth or age, in sickness, in distress, it is the same constant friend with whom we can never quarrel, with whom we are at peace. Within such an object seem to be gathered up all the scenes of the past and all the hopes of the future. We impart to it all our experiences and it keeps them for us; we entrust it with all our dreams, and these it treasures too. There are no secrets between us; it shares our sorrows as it shares our joys.

There are countless millions of these little sanctuaries in the wide breadth of the world, each of them a beloved centre of intimate, personal association. Such a one there is in a country south of the Thames, where beech and oak and growing coppice are as yet unspoilt by axe or smoke or babel of men. It is a fair-sized meadow, skirted by a reedy pond

with woods behind it. How often have I trodden its close-cropped pasture, hummocky with ant-heaps, mist-ridden at times, and listened to the voice of the wild-fowl in the rushes by the bank! In all the years I have known it, the secrets of this sedge-grown mere have never been disclosed. It is the home of the coot, the dabchick, and the waterhen. You see them at times feeding and sporting in the open spaces, but their life's work is hidden in the tall weeds. There they nest and accomplish their little destinies out of view of the prying eyes of the world. Shyest of the three is the brown dabchick. In an instant he is under water when he discovers you, and as you watch for the speck of his reappearing head and catch sight of it far away from his first diving-place he has dipped again and will be seen no more. But the waterhen is my special favourite, for the coot is a little too self-contained, a trifle reserved and uncompanionable, sailing at a distance with that gleaming phylactery upon his brow, while the dabchick is too fearful of man, too untameable for human intercourse. Not so with the waterhen. She would see you and yet not be seen, and then, like a coy maiden, invite your attention. Peeping out of the reeds, she shows herself for a moment and then retires; but so strong is her vanity, her need for admiration, that presently she will swim into the open, ducking her head and looking at you out of the corner of her eye, and will even land upon the shore of her inland sea, flirting her tail, and picking her way in timorous and dainty fashion, exhibiting to the best advantage her dusky suit and green stockings. These are the true tenants

of the pond. It is their little world. Here they live, and, in the end, die. Within its sedges lies their whole experience, and they appear to want no more. The water-rat and the mole drive their dark corridors in its sides to-day, but to-morrow they may be far afield cutting their way in other pastures by other waters. The wild teal nest in its reeds, but they feast elsewhere, visiting a score of moonlit lakes while we are sleeping in our beds. The stately heron fishes there at times, standing like a sentinel for hours on end, but he has other hunting-grounds over miles of country and our pond to him is only one of many beats. But for the coot, the waterhen and the dabchick it is their home and school, the only pleasance, the watery arena of all their life's activities.

What memories the sight of pond, field, and wood conjure up, with all the little stirrings in the grass, and the fish splashing in the water, and the voices of the birds, and the smell of earth and leaf and bark! There is a thrush singing in an oak-tree—the same lichened stem, the same forked branch, the identical outline against the sky, the same melody as thirty years ago. Cattle are grazing lazily in the meadow, plover are wheeling overhead, a rabbit is nibbling by the covert side—can it be that all these years have passed, when everything about me is the same? It is here that I found the partridge's eggs, hunting by the hedgerow with a whittled stick, and here they lie once more. *There* is the very hole under the holly-root where we killed the monster rat with dog and ferret; and here is the gate in the corner, facing the old house, where I used to sit and look

out over field and water, dreaming and weaving fantasies, all these long years ago. It seems a newer gate now, but one of the ancient posts is still there, a silent witness of those vanished days.

At that time I was of a melancholy turn, like many another youth. All the objects of the senses seemed to be completely external to me. The whole body of my experience stood out clearly and defined, and I felt naked and alone before it. This isolation made me turn inwards upon myself. I yearned for some deeper companionship; I longed to be released from this enveloping and oppressive wall of Fate that was hemming me in on every side, and to be free of it all. There was nothing in common between us. It imprisoned me. It was alien and unsympathetic and intolerably real, and the only way of escape seemed to be to try to take shelter in my own self. Then, as the years went by, I came to have a strange belief. This vast objective was *my* world, my own unconscious creation. I no longer stood in isolation from it as something external and indifferent. From being independent of my existence it became gradually unreal, the result of certain arbitrary laws of thought and sense which I could not understand or will to be different. Whereas in the past I had wandered like a wraith among hard realities, I now felt myself to be the only real nucleus amid a multitude of dreams. The grouping of objects was *my* grouping, connected among themselves by the consciousness of my own unity. It was as though this unity imposed itself upon my world and welded it into a whole, and in so doing enabled me in turn to be conscious of myself as one. At times

I felt that had I sufficient power of will, I could have reduced it all to what it truly was, a mere dream-picture, and that I should then have recognized it as such and awakened to a different experience. It was the very antithesis of my feelings as a youth. My spirit in the one case was bafflingly unreal amid a callous crowd of material things. In the other it was the only reality and all the rest a lifelong illusion. A little more clearness of vision, a trifle more faith, and would it not be possible for the spirit to brush aside these immaterial shadows and see for the first time its own world of reality?

It was in this latter mood that I wandered through the haunts of my boyhood. Dear to me were they more than a generation ago; doubly so to-day if indeed they were part of myself, the dream part, the innocent reflection of the soul. Was not the lark's song my song, mounting and losing itself in the blue ether? Was not the crystal rivulet, escaping from the sluices and tumbling in a cataract through tangled greenery, myself again, wending its way through brake and briar to the dim and distant sea? The crooning of the wind in the tree-tops, surely did not that belong to me also, invisible, blowing from the unknown and hurrying thither? How great a mystery it was!

Pond and field and wood lay radiant in the sunlight; the air was full of music; it was an afternoon in May. A cuckoo's note was wafted from afar, a pike leaped in the water; from the hazel covert, misty-blue with hyacinth, sounded the clear tinkling of a little stream. The spell of the supernatural was on all. Then suddenly, from across the meadow,

in the direction of the old house, a voice was shouting for me, the ringing voice of a child. What witchcraft was it that had held me all this time? The voice was insistent, urgent, the call of impatient youth. As I turned to go, I cast one long look backward to this golden visionary scene. But already a metamorphosis had taken place. The glory had departed. Once more was I face to face with reality; common sense had repossession of me; I had left my fairyland behind.

IX

HAY-MAKING

It was the hottest day we had had that year. How well I remember it! There are such days and hours, all too few, when life seems to be gathered up, to be at its full; when the spirits are buoyant, when there is nothing to mar the sun-kissed face of Nature, when everything conspires for one brief span to make you forget death and disease and sorrow. It was nearly the end of our hay-making, and as the barometer was falling we were anxious to get it in. How hard we toiled throughout that day, from early morning until past ten o'clock at night! There were a couple of fields to be carried and we had only one cart and a single horse. But all the hands had turned out to help, and we worked with a will, while the sun burned in a cloudless sky, and not a breath of wind stirred the fallen blades. The fields were just beyond the garden, flanking a large fish-pond, and flanked in turn by a wood of oak and beech carpeted with bracken and intersected by mossy ways. There, at night, the owl was wont to utter its haunting plaint, and during the day thrush and blackbird from unseen recesses of dense undergrowth trilled and piped their loved, familiar song.

What a peaceful scene it was, of field, wood, water, and garden, and the old manor-house that had

stood there for centuries until its red brick had paled from exposure to all the weathers of all those years! How many hay-makings had it witnessed, how many more would it see? How indifferent it must be to the changes of owners, of the generations, of the fortunes of those who lived there! Endeared as it becomes in turn, like a beautiful woman to lovers who succeed one another without ever capturing her heart, how unemotionally must it contemplate the fever and the antics of the present when it remembers all the past!

But of such meditations the mind of the man in charge of the hay-making was completely free. Living in a village a few miles away, he was employed by the tenant-farmers to thatch their ricks, and in the case of private owners with a few fields, to advise and direct when the haying and harvesting came round. He was a tough little fellow of sixty odd years, with no spare flesh upon his bones, untiring, a master of his craft, dogmatic, incisive, unhesitating in all his opinions, and with a certain dry humour which all the liquor he consumed during the day could not damp. Recognized as an expert, his instructions were obeyed without question, and were given in a crisp, though genial fashion, sometimes from the top of an enormous load, as though he were a captain shouting his orders from the bridge of a ship. For fifty years he had toiled in hay and other crops, and so thick a layer of dust had become deposited on the surface of his gullet that his thirst had become well-nigh unquenchable. A pint of beer to him was like emptying a jug of water on the Sahara. It was sucked up instantly, and left

the man as dry as ever. His efficiency was enormous. He was everywhere -- at one moment raking the swaths into rows, then shaking them out for a final baking, then standing on the cart to receive the loaded forks, or high upon the rick, deftly packing the hay according to its texture and its length. His knowledge of the weather was like his thirst, unplumbed. 'We shall have rain to-morrow, my lads' -- and rain it did, but the hay was in. To my untutored vision the sky looked innocent of any watery design; but some shade of colour near the horizon had warned him of a coming change, or was it perhaps the smell of the air, or the flight of the birds, or the incessant teasing of the flies? These indeed seemed to be swarming in unprecedented hordes, especially the horse-flies that settled on old Joe, and bit him till they drew blood. Whenever we saw one on him we killed it, but the poor old horse must have suffered a good deal that day, as a rule quite patiently, sometimes, however, tortured beyond endurance, when he would furiously paw the ground or lash out distractedly with a hind leg.

It was a wonderful crop that year. There had been no rain for weeks. In fact, it was hardly necessary to turn the hay. The sun's powerful rays penetrated to the ground and dried it through and through, and what dew there was had disappeared by eight o'clock in the morning. The two fields had had a chain-harrow over them and then been rolled, so that they had been mown evenly and close to the ground, and Tom Brooker, with an assurance bred of long experience, reckoned we should get over a ton to the acre. There were nine of us

altogether—George Smith, Jack Smith, Alfred Lewis, Jim Payne, Frank Tarrant, George Denman, Abel Martin, Tom Brooker, and myself. George Smith had the thews of a young ox; Jack Smith was long and loose-limbed, with the heart of a boy; Alfred Lewis was morose, silent, and efficient; Jim Payne old and slow, but plodding; Frank Tarrant a rather weakly, but willing worker; George Denman a husky fellow and capable; Abel Martin a newcomer; and I myself, leading, as I had, a sedentary life for a long while, was out of condition, and obliged to snatch intervals of rest from time to time. The hay had been cut two days previously, and turned just once the day before, but so fierce was the sun that it was found unnecessary to turn it again or make it into cocks, so we merely raked it into rows and pitched it into the cart as fast as we could, only shaking out a few patches of grass which were underneath trees and not yet quite dry.

How we looked forward to the intervals when from a side door in the old manor-house there would emerge a figure carrying a couple of jugs! Every two hours or so he would cross the lawn in his shirt-sleeves, setting the liquor down beneath a huge oak that stood by the pond. Ten good minutes would then be allowed or perhaps a short quarter of an hour and we would lie by the water's edge, watching the gorgeous dragon-flies darting to and fro among the reeds, their jewelled bodies aflame with amethystine fire. There were a couple of kingfishers, too, with a nest in a steep bank where the water escaped over a sluice. The eye was hardly swift enough to follow them as they sped

and flashed across the water leaving in the track of memory a trail of heavenly blue. It was a pond full of vitality and mystery, for in parts of it the rushes were thick and tall, the asylum of the moorhen, and the coot, and that shyest of all water-fowl, the little dabchick. You could hear them rustling in the reeds, and then a head and bill would appear for a moment and again be withdrawn, and only the chuck of contentment or warning would tell you where they were. The banks were honey-combed with corridors where ran the gentle water-voles, untimid of man, mistaken by the ignorant for common house-rats, but nibbling sweet herbs and grasses, clean in their habits, the little beavers of the English pond. And the water itself was full of life—of perch, roach, tench, carp, and pike, and shoals of minnows. A huge jack was lord of it, the grizzly terror of the small fry. Twenty years back his brother had been caught, a giant of over twenty-three pounds, and since then the survivor had grown still bigger until this watery domain seemed too confined a habitat for so great a monster. On rare occasions he would show himself, in very hot weather when the pond was low, swimming right across the middle of it from end to end, majestically, with one fin above water, cutting it like a prow and leaving in his track a shimmering, ever-widening wake. And lastly, there were the swallows wheeling and eddying in miraculous flight, cleaving with their crescent shapes the torrid, scintillating air. All these we saw or heard as we lay beneath the great oak upon the pond's brink. Life was worth living at such moments. The peace

of it was irresistible and the draughts of beer which freshened and sustained us were like the nectar of the gods. We could have lain thus for hours. Indeed, it seemed hours since we had lain thus, for Nature was playing to us in her most sensuous mood. Her siren strains were weakening our wills, lulling our energies to sleep, captivating our senses, and had it not been for Tom Brooker we should almost have succumbed. This veteran was immune to aesthetic emotion and the artistries of life. His school were the grasses of the earth, and his goal the rick, and alcohol having no perceptible effect upon him, swallows might dip and dip in vain, and Nature discover all her beauties unremarked, so far as he was concerned.

‘Now, my lads, we’ve got to get that hay. Steady on, Jim, with the beer or you’ll get drowned. Say, Jim, can you tell me something? What side of Birley Church does the old yew grow?’—‘What side does the old yew grow?—Why, on the north side, Tom.’—‘No, it don’t, Jim, it grows on the outside.’—‘That’s one up for you, Tom,’ says Jack Smith. ‘Did you know I once was a preacher, Tom?’ says Jim Payne—‘I preached the first sermon ever preached in Birley pulpit; for when the chaps carried it in after the church was built, I got up in it and wished ’em all good luck.’—‘That’s one on you, Tom,’ says another.—The first field was now carried and we went on to the second, a smaller area, but the time was getting on. There was not a breath of air, and, although the sun was lower in the heaven, its beams seemed to be as powerful as ever. The old horse was tiring. The flies had maltreated him

shamefully, and we could not always find at once where one had settled. We were all getting tired. Earlier in the day we had shouted at one another, and there had been much mutual chaff, but we now worked practically in silence. The sun was sinking fast, yet a great expanse of unraked hay still stretched before us. Tom Brooker was a first-rate architect. The way he packed the rick and built up its walls evoked our admiration. 'Now, my lads, I want a load of short stuff to go in the middle and then some of the long for the outside.' He picked his loads with care and yet with economy of time, never going back any distance to get inconsiderable heaps that had been left behind; and this made the work of two of the rakers an ever-urgent job. They followed the main march of the little army, and it was all they could do to keep up with it, for Tom was the tidiest man alive. He could not bear to leave anything behind. His intention was, so he said, to leave no more than an armful of hay on the ground when we had done—'Just enough to fill your pillow-case, Jim.' Yes, it was exacting work, and the draughts of beer began to be more frequent. It was now eight o'clock, and every hour a couple of jugs were brought out to us, and we drank standing, for there was no time for resting now. We were rapidly building up another stack for the second field, but it was still only half-way up. Tom now was almost silent, and beer was handed to him at short intervals. The sun had set—a huge orb of glory that gilded our little rick and the rows of hay and the toilers. Along the margin of the horizon there was a greenish haze, but the firmament was


cloudless. There was not an atom of moisture in the evening air, no apparent presage of change, yet Tom Brooker knew better. 'It will rain to-morrow, lads. Get me some of that short stuff.' I could see no signs of rain in that wonderful sky, but Tom turned out to be right. That delicate apple-green spelt, so I had thought, a lovely day on the morrow, but there must have been some subtle expression that had flitted across the face of the evening which had warned this old observer of the heavens, some minatory alternation of hues, some tenuous wisp of cloud that had escaped me.

A colloque now took place, a brief council of war. Could the field be carried? Tom Brooker put it to the meeting. Were we willing to carry on till after ten? There was a moment's silence, and then Jack Smith spoke: 'Come on, lads, let's get it in.' The old horse's head was drooping low, but he was no longer tormented by the flies. My hands were blistered by the rake, my arms ached, and my feet were sore, and we were all exhausted and slower in our movements than earlier in the day. It was now late evening or, rather, night. The bats had emerged from the ivy and eaves of the ancient house, and were flickering round our heads as we worked. An owl started hooting in the wood near by, and the sky darkened to an impenetrable canopy of darkest blue. We looked like ghostly silhouettes, the old horse unutterably weary, but ever-patient, the wain heaped with hay, and Tom Brooker on the top of it, and the silent men raking in the last few rows. At length three of our number dropped out as there was no more for them to do, then a couple

more, then a sixth man, until only three of us were left. The last load was standing under the rick, and while one of us tossed it up to Tom Brooker, the other cleaned up round the stack and got the remainder. The final prongful had now been taken in and we wished Tom good night. He said he was going to stay for a minute or two longer to finish shaping the top. The ladder stood against the side and his bicycle leant against a fence a short distance away. I turned home, but when I had gone a few steps looked back. It was now night, close on eleven o'clock. Tom Brooker stood on the summit of the stack outlined against the darkling sky. A slight breeze had sprung up and a few cloudlets had risen above the horizon. An owl was hooting and the bats were hunting for their food. But there was no other sound or visible movement except the water of the stream tinkling into the pond. Sleep had descended upon the eyelids of the world, and the whole landscape was in a trance. Tom Brooker alone was awake, packing in the hay, rounding off his rick, for he knew that the rain was coming in the morning.

How often have I looked back upon that day in June! The whole scene is before me and almost every incident. The scent of the hay is in my nostrils, and the shouts of the men in my ears. It was a midsummer-day's dream. Now it is mid-winter, and leaden skies hang like a pall over the dank and cheerless Earth. The woods are leafless and dripping with moisture, and not a note is to be heard. The swallows are wheeling in other lands over other waters, the dragon-flies are all dead and their

gemmed bodics turned to dust, and the lovely roses of the garden have lost their petals long ago. But the two ricks are there, a little darker in hue and more compact, thatched now and waiting to be used. I stood under the last one only the other evening and pulled a handful out of it, closing my eyes, and the scent of it brought all summer back, and that golden day. I could see the kingfishers, and the blue sky reflected in the pond, and the loaded wain, and the jugs beneath the tree, and Tom Brooker alone upon the rick with the shadows of the summer night closing about him.



X

POACHERS

THE word 'poacher' is redolent of country life. It exudes adventure. It conjures up woods, hedge-rows, stubbles, fallow land and streams, rains and frosts, winds and cold starlit nights. You can see in your mind's eye the iridescent trout, the lordly pheasant, the plump partridge, the hare, the squatting rabbit. What a succulent array of delicious meats! What skill it requires to add them to your larder, if you are a poacher; what acquaintance with their habits, what intimate observation of their haunts, what patient study of the methods of those who guard them. As it takes long practice to be an efficient gamekeeper, to 'show' your birds, to come unscathed through all the manifold dangers and trials of nesting, hatching, rearing, up to the final test of the shoot, so does it to be a successful poacher. It is no use his being an amateur. He has got to be a professional to his finger-tips. He must labour diligently before he can safely challenge the constituted authorities who preside over the game laws, before he can circumvent the artfulness of his wary prey. And what is the reward of all this toil? If he be working alone, a couple of brace of pheasants in the night, if he is lucky, or a hare or half a dozen rabbits or a fat trout or two. At the best a few

shillings, far below the market value of the game, from the receiver of these stolen goods. If one of a gang, not much more, when all the expenses have been paid and the shares allotted. It cannot be for the pecuniary reward that the poacher follows his hazardous and difficult calling. He could make far more and probably more easily, being presumably an active intelligent fellow, in various other ways. It is love of the sport, of the risk, of the life, the craze for adventure that drives him out at night under cover of the darkness. It is not the carcass of the pheasant, but the spice of danger, the possibility of discovery, the dexterity often required in pursuit of these wild creatures, that gives zest to these nocturnal rambles. Picture to yourself the excitement of netting rabbits by a covert-side on a moonlit night. There are, perhaps, half a dozen men engaged in it. The business has to be transacted with the utmost speed, and yet all the paraphernalia for the catch carefully removed afterwards, for it is expensive to buy. Each member of the gang must be on the alert, for the keepers and police have been vigilant of late and the squealing of a rabbit may lead to disaster. A dog-cart or small motor is in attendance on a road near by to take the swag. It has been placed under a tree out of sight, and a look-out man is watching the approaches with a whistle in his hand. Or our poacher may be working on his own, the safest course, for confederates are sometimes foolhardy and even treacherous. He is walking down a track in the wood on a December night gazing up into the branches of the oak-trees, for he was out earlier in the evening and heard some

birds go up and knows approximately where they are, the cocks having noisily advertised their roosting-place, the hens going up more quietly with a brief fluttering as they settled on their perch. Although the leaf is off, the pheasants are difficult to see, especially the hens with their shorter tails, for everything is the same colour at night, and the birds sit as though carved in stone. At length he spies a hen against the moonlight on a bough that stretches over the ride, and, aiming carefully with his air-gun, brings it down with a loud thud and flapping of wings. Luckily there is a brisk wind blowing in the tree-tops or the neighbouring birds would have been alarmed and these in turn might have given warning to someone on the watch. Next morning the keeper will see the feathers lying under the bough, and staring down at them will wonder sadly how many more victims there were, and shrewdly suspect who the culprit is. Our poacher is not consciously a romantic fellow, but the moonlight casts a glamour round his deeds, and he is aware of an exaltation as he gathers his bird and creeps among the shadows, hardly more than a shadow himself, looking for another shot. He picks his way carefully, avoiding the dead twigs that strew the path, and pausing ere he turns a bend in the track. If he is out on a summer evening, a night-jar may be calling in the recesses of the underwood, a gurgling, whirring note. Nothing resembles it in Nature. It might be likened to the sound made by a spinning-wheel or bubbling water, but it is inimitable and adds to the mystery of these watches of the night. In addition to his knowledge of the habits of

different kinds of game, our freebooter is versed in various other lore. He can tell you where the hedgehogs drag themselves along and what they feed upon, the sort of weather they prefer, and the favourite hour for their excursions. He is acquainted with the haunts of the voles and all their little ways. He has spied upon the stoat and weasel hunting their prey; has seen the brown owl fastening its talons in the tender mouse, chasing the big moths, disgorging bones and feathers after its meal. He has watched the otter and the fox and the great bats, told the time by a glow-worm held against the dial of his watch, and knows where to look for certain stars. How interesting all this makes the hours of the night when other folk are abed, soused in sleep. It is worth all the risks and the slenderness of the monetary gain. He has the woods to himself and can think his thoughts undisturbed. As for his conscience, it irks him not at all. The breach of the game laws is nothing to him, for he does not recognize their moral force. The rabbit limping along ahead cost the owner of the land nothing. It is as wild as the hawks of the air and may be nibbling the lettuces in his own garden to-morrow. In fact, he is doing the landlord a service, although the latter would not own it, by helping to keep down these voracious rodents that in hard weather bark the underwood and young tellers. So too with the pheasant he has just shot. Who knows whether it was a wild bird or not, where it came from or whither it would have strayed if it had not fallen to his gun? Sport is sport the world over, and a fellow-feeling should make us wondrous kind. There

is no more wrong in pocketing a hare that perhaps has travelled for miles than picking a mushroom when you are crossing someone else's field. The law says otherwise, but it is a law which is the least disgraceful to break of any. It is the keepers' duty, no doubt, to watch over their preserves, to catch him if they can; but to argue that his sport is a crime, a sin against society, well, only a hidebound Tory landlord and his satellites would maintain it for a moment. So he pursues his hobby without any qualms of conscience, largely for the sake of the sport itself and the lure of the woods. He may be brutal, but is not necessarily so. He may be a scurvy knave, but poaching need not have made him one. He may be debauched, but he has never learnt his vices in the woods. As the years go by he will become feebler, less alert, slower. His eyesight will fail him, rheumatism will creep into his muscles, his hearing will be less acute, and one night he will fall into the clutches of his enemies, who will have no mercy on their ancient foe. But if he has been a sportsman; if he has poached for the love of the game, of the woods at night, of the stillness of Nature under the moon, he will have little to regret. He will be able to look back on a life of adventure, when he pitted his craft against those who were out to catch him, a life of illegalities and risk, but not a sordid nor a mean one. He will have broken the law systematically and without shame, but with the prospect of a payment so small as almost not to count at all. He will be pointed out, when as an old fellow he sits with stiff joints in front of his cottage door, as once the cleverest poacher of his day, and

no one will think any the worse of him. In fact, the young generation will regard him with interest and even admiration, for the romance of all those moonlit nights will cling to him still.

And these reflections recall to my mind two incidents connected with poaching that occurred when I was living in our old home in the Midlands just before and in the first few days of the Great War. Unlike the portrait of the poacher sketched in the preceding pages, idealized perhaps you will say, there was a savagery and painfulness about these others which, so far at any rate as one of them is concerned, has never failed to distress me whenever I have happened to think about it since; and it is partly as a penance long-delayed that I set it down here.

It was the last day of August in 1914. Our house had been converted into a recruiting office, and a sergeant, a medical officer, and myself, together with a small staff of other helpers, were engaged every day and all day holding meetings in the neighbourhood, examining recruits and filling up forms. We had already induced many hundreds to enlist. The patriotic spirit in this mining centre was aflame, and some of the pits had been nearly emptied of their youth. But more and ever more recruits were needed, and I had received a letter from Kitchener, a circular sent out to various districts, appealing for further men. It was late that evening when we had finished work, round about midnight, and we were dog-tired. It had been an exceptionally heavy day, and we had just made up our minds to retire to bed, when the bell

of the back-door clanged, and I heard the butler's footsteps crossing the stone floor. A prolonged colloquy appeared to be taking place, and he then came in and informed us that a young man had called who wished to see us urgently and would not go away. At such a crisis in our history no individual trouble was considered too burdensome nor inconvenience too great, and we bade the butler show him in. I can see our visitor now as he entered the room and stood before us, cap in hand. He was an insignificant and pasty-faced little fellow. He told us that he was anxious to join up at once as he had heard there was a draft leaving the village early in the morning. We pointed out that we had finished for the night and that he had better return the next day. He looked so white and narrow-chested that we felt pretty confident he would never pass the medical examination. But he implored us to let him get away. He had persuaded half a dozen of his pals to enlist by promising that he would go too. They would expect to see him at the station in the morning, and, if he failed them, they would never forgive him and he would be ashamed of it for life. We were impressed by his gentle demeanour. He looked as though he would not hurt a fly. We were attracted to and at the same time sorry for him. War was too ugly a medium for this mild-mannered little man. It was the overmastering call of duty, the ineluctable summons to sacrifice his all in the hour of his country's need, that was stirring to its foundations all that was best beneath this unheroic exterior. At length we consented on the condition that the doctor passed him. He stripped off his

clothes and a less athletic specimen could not be imagined, considering that he was a miner accustomed to the hard work of hewing coal. His shrimp-like form would not have mattered so much, but his heart was none too good, and this the doctor told him as kindly as he could. He would never stand the strain of active service and would be invalided home almost at once. He could do valuable work at home and help the fellows out in France in other ways. But the lad would have none of it. He would rather destroy himself than stay at home. He was stronger than he looked, and had never been ill, and tears began to gather. I took the doctor aside and we had a consultation. Kitchener had pleaded for every young man who could shoulder a gun. Ought we to turn this one down, especially after his promise to his friends? He was a poor example physically, but undoubtedly a good plucked one. His heart was in the right place. He might come through all right, after all. At this grave juncture one must not look too meticulously into questions of physique. I took his part strongly, and gradually wore the doctor's opposition down. The young fellow put on his clothes, took the oath, thanked us, and left next morning with the early draft. Two days later we heard that a head-gamekeeper on a neighbouring estate had been brutally assaulted a couple of nights before and left for dead. He and an under-keeper had surprised five men with nets poaching rabbits by a covert-side, and the latter, who were miners, had attacked them with sticks. The under-keeper had had an arm broken and the head-keeper was felled to the ground. As the latter lay there, stunned

by the blow, so the under-keeper related, one of the gang, a small chap, whom he believed he recognized, had repeatedly bashed the head-keeper's face with a handkerchief filled with sharp flints, and the ruffians had then made off. The head-keeper's right eye had been destroyed and his skull fractured. For ten days he lay in hospital between life and death, and at last succumbed to his injuries, leaving a widow and several children. There was a hue and cry, but to no purpose, for none of the gang had been identified, with the possible exception of the one who had made the final and cowardly attack. The under-keeper thought he was a young miner, named —, who lived in a village not far away, and the police went to make inquiries. But this particular man had left on active service a week before. I was interviewed and we looked up the papers, and the doctor and I then suddenly remembered. The police were after the little white-faced fellow who had kept us up so late that night begging to be allowed to leave with the draft the following morning. In those days the war occupied everyone's mind, to the exclusion of all else. Although the keeper died, no steps were taken to get our recruit back to be identified or stand his trial. In the first place, the under-keeper was not absolutely certain as to the identity; in the second, the fellow would probably be killed in any case. The doctor and I, however, had no doubt. The little man had been flying from justice that night, from the terror of a hangman's rope, and he had escaped the noose by a hair's-breadth. A year later he fell in France and his name was inscribed in due course upon the local memorial

as one of the heroes of the war. His friends in the village still speak of him with pride and affection as one who 'did his bit.'

The other incident took place a few weeks earlier than the one just described. Our gamekeeper had asked for a dog that not only would guard his premises by day, but would go about with him at night when he went upon his rounds. He wanted what was known as a 'night-dog,' a cross between a mastiff and bull-dog and specially trained for the purpose. For these dogs were taken out at night, muzzled, and on a leash, and, if unslipped, would chase and overthrow their quarry, standing over their victim until called off, but doing no other harm to the latter beyond perhaps a heavy fall. We advertised in the press and after an interval heard of an animal which seemed just suited for the work. He was to come on trial for a week, and, if he proved satisfactory, fifteen pounds were to be paid for him. Before his arrival there was a good deal of discussion as to what kind of test should be applied. At length it was decided to stage as lifelike a poaching affray as was possible to achieve. But who was to be the poacher? It was here that the keeper made a suggestion. He knew of a man, nicknamed 'Charley Peace' after the notorious Sheffield murderer, one of the toughest, roughest customers in the district, a really brutal blackguard who had been a poacher at one time, but now gave the gamekeepers of the neighbourhood a hand when it was wanted. He was the very man, powerful, experienced, crafty, merciless. A suitable piece of ground was selected, Charley Peace engaged, and an outline of the

impending drama rehearsed on the spot. It was a winding, grassy glade in one of the woods. The keeper and the dog were to walk down it and at a given moment the 'poacher' was to appear round a corner, carrying a dead rabbit in one hand and a stick in the other. The keeper was to shout, the poacher was to raise his stick as though in attack, the dog, securely muzzled, was to be released and the struggle between man and beast would then begin. The night for the test arrived. A friend was staying with me at the time, and he and I and the keeper sallied forth on the adventure at about eleven o'clock at night. The dog, 'Don' by name, was on a leash and muzzled. His breadth and depth of chest were enormous, his head huge and magnificent, his mighty legs and shoulders swelling with sinew, the expression upon his wrinkled jowl lowering and intrepid. We entered the wood silently and in single file, the keeper leading. It was a perfect night for the experiment—a bright moon, with occasional clouds flitting across it, a light breeze and dry underfoot. All was still, but for the hooting of an owl somewhere close at hand. The trees were a mixture of oak and fir, and the hazel underwood hedged us about with a wall of darkness. When we reached the ride where the encounter was to take place, we all halted for a moment, holding our breath, and an eerie feeling took possession of me. The shadows of the trees across the glade, the silence, an occasional sighing of the wind in the branches, the pale light of the moon, the secrecy of our movements, the knowledge of the hidden watcher, all contributed to it. At length we started off again.

There were thirty yards of straight track in front of us and then it twisted to the left into further depths of the wood. The keeper had his hand on the dog's collar and was peering ahead. As for Don, he too was staring ahead, suspicious, intent, dangerous. Within eight paces of the turning a man stepped out with a rabbit in one hand and a stick in another. The gamekeeper shouted at him, Charley Peace raised his stick, and the dog, frantic with excitement, was slipped from the leash. There then began a duel the like of which none of us had ever seen. In the dusk of the glade, man and dog seemed hardly real. They fought in shadowy silence, ruthlessly, cunningly, savagely. With all the force of his iron arm the man would bring down his heavy stick upon the dog's head and flanks. With indomitable courage the dog would leap in again and again with all the weight of his massive bulk against the man's chest and throat to dash him over. Neither could get an advantage. Sometimes they would pause, eyeing one another malignantly, panting, breathless. Then the dog would hurl himself to the attack once more. We could hear the pitiless blows falling upon his skull and flanks, but not a whimper nor a growl did he utter. Once or twice he nearly had the man down, and but for the great strength and agility of the latter he could never have stood his ground at all. The man's breath was now coming in gasps and the dog's sides were heaving and his muzzle dripping with saliva as they stood waiting to recover themselves. You could see that they were nearly exhausted and that the fight could not last much longer. At length the gallant dog made one

more supreme effort, launching the whole weight of bone and muscle against the tired body of his antagonist. It was too much for Charley Peace. He had never reckoned on a fight like this, and was dead beat. He threw up his hands, struggled desperately to keep his footing, and then fell over backwards with a mighty crash into the undergrowth, with Don on the top of him. For the first time in his life he had suffered defeat. We pulled the dog off, untied the muzzle, and after giving them both a drink and rest, returned slowly home. We had witnessed as gallant an exhibition as anyone would wish to see, for the dog had been robbed of half his power, of his chief, his only effective weapon, and, in spite of all the cruel punishment he had suffered, had not flinched, had uttered no sound, but fought with splendid courage, loyalty, and determination until he had brought down his foe. Charley Peace demanded a big fee and got it, but told us that he would never go through such a test again. His chest and ribs were bruised, his hands and face bloody and his clothes torn, and had it not been for the muzzle, he would never have left the place alive. As for Don, his end was a sad one. A cheque for fifteen pounds was posted next day, and he was housed in the kennels, an honoured guest. But after a few weeks he sickened and became gradually thinner. The vet was called in, but could diagnose no definite injury. The dog lost his appetite and cheerfulness and lay at the back of the kennel apathetic and melancholy. The punishment had been too much for him. He had been belaboured all over the body by the most powerful man within

many miles, wielding the toughest stick he could find, for nearly half an hour. Head, ribs, back, legs, chest, every part of the poor animal's anatomy had been mercilessly pounded by this iron strength. Although gallant to the end and uncomplaining, although triumphant, it had broken him up, and after a few months he was dead, long before his time, through the cruelty of man. I have never forgiven myself for the part I took in the proceedings, innocent though I believed them at the time to be.

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XI

FEAST WEEK

THE Feast, or, as it is called in some parts, the Wakes, was religious in origin. It was a 'festa' held in honour of the tutelary Saint of a particular church, and the people of the village and surrounding districts were wont to assemble in the sacred edifice on the eve of the birthday, waking throughout the night and offering prayers of thanksgiving. Now, however, it has lost its honourable significance and become merely a secular fair. In our own village Feast Sunday is always the first Sunday in July, the Fair itself generally lasting from the Friday till the Tuesday, the properties of the showmen arriving on the Thursday and departing again the following Wednesday. Our tutelary Saint is St. James of blessed memory; but little thought, I fear, is vouchsafed to his saintliness on these occasions or to the fine old fabric of which he is the patron. To make up for this neglect, however, the business of a feast is conducted with a good deal more decorum than in times not so far distant, when public-houses were open till midnight, and beer was a penny a pint. In those rollicking days feasts were often the scenes of impropriety and rowdyism, and the maid-servants at the Squires' houses were not allowed as a rule to attend them in the evening. Earlier still,

conditions seem to have been even worse, for an ancient author tells us that 'the pepull fell to letcherie, and song, and daunces, with harping and piping, and also to glotony and sinne, and so turned the holyness to cursydness.' But in 1931 scarcely a blush need have been brought to the cheek of the most bashful of our maidens.

The ordinary village feast differs from other festivals in this, that what are known as the well-to-do rarely take any part in it. It is a banquet of delight spread for the poor, and the pence and smaller silver coins of the realm are the takings that make the fortunes of the promoters. Human nature loves a circus. Even now, when I see a long string of caravans, with tent-poles and water-carts and gilded monstrosities, and all the paraphernalia of a fair moving along a road, I can scarce resist the impulse to follow it to its destination and help in the unpacking. Have you noticed all the women standing in the doorways as it goes lumbering by like a huge caterpillar, sometimes in two or three sections, stretching over half a mile? Is it not a grand spectacle, a moving sight? You feel the blood racing more quickly in your veins. It represents pageantry, romance, adventure, danger. It tells of a nomad life, of strange, swarthy faces seen to-day and gone to-morrow, of wanderings in all weathers, of glittering afternoons and nights, of hardships and toil, laughter and wonder. No age can resist the charm. The very young are crazy with excitement, and in the old there is a stirring, and from deep down, out of the mist of years, there rises a holiday feeling, memories of irresponsible hours,

of long-departed childhood, when life was a madcap riding on the breeze.

So this summer I slipped away, unbeknown to the rest of the household, to attend the feast. Two days previously I had witnessed the arrival of the procession. Its pomp and circumstance filled the whole village. One by one the great juggernauts debouched into the paddock where the Fair was to be held, one leviathan after another, and still they kept on coming. What shoutings and commands, what hurrying to and fro, what masterly manœuvring as each painted giant turned in at the gate! What grindings and sirens and horns, as the ponderous lorries were piloted to safety! The best rooms at the inn had been booked by the showman. He arrived like a conqueror after a victorious campaign, laden with the spoils of half a dozen provinces, and took possession of the village, body and soul, quartering his troops on the inhabitants and dislocating the routine of ordinary life.

It was as fine an evening as I can remember. The sun had set in a cloudless sky, and not a breath of air stirred blade or leaf. The field where the scene was set was now a blaze of artificial light. Torches flared on the outskirts of the encampment, and the rest of it was lit with dazzling electric globes. Not a millimetre of surface in the whole place had been left unilluminated, not a nook or cranny where a fly could have crept unobserved. It was a deluge of pitiless light. Publicity, staring gilt, and crude colour, vied in their merciless want of reserve with the infernal racket of the machinery and the blare of the loud-speakers. A monster

gramophone dominated the centre, and at each corner a smaller one had been installed with its own strident programme. The space occupied by the merry-go-rounds was a veritable eddy of human and inanimate bodies, menacing structures of wood and iron revolving in all directions and at every gradient, each one loaded with a motley freight of shouting and gesticulating girls and boys, young men and women. There was so great a variety of choice that one scarcely knew where to begin or how to end—swiftly-spinning roundabouts for the venturesome, slower ones for the less enterprising; racing motors on circular rails or zigzagging in and out in mild collision; a narrow platform of jointed plates running over a switchback, and with a double motion, the ribbon at intervals jerking smartly backwards and forwards, affording those who were clinging on for dear life the horrid illusion of a choppy sea. There were dart-throwing and rifle-shooting for prizes, swings that lifted almost vertically into the air, ice-cream and nougat stalls, and, finally, gambling galore — on the speed of little automatic cars, on pennies placed on rotating colours, or on the result of some elaborate calculation with a slot-machine.

Perhaps the most attractive game of chance was being played at a couple of large round tables with a hole in the middle for the girls in charge. You held your copper at the top of a sloping groove and then released it. Down it rolled on to the table, and, if it came neatly to rest in the middle of a square marked with a number, you got your money back, multiplied may be, by as much as three.

There was a good-looking lad at one of these, spending recklessly, and losing at almost every attempt. The wench in charge was rough and none too clean, but young and full of sap. She was obviously attracted by the handsome, extravagant boy, plainly out at elbows and ill able to afford the expenditure and you could see the conflict in her face between professional duty and the hope that he might win. She began advising him. A half-wistful, tender look came into her eyes and a faint blush overspread her common features. But he was quite unobservant, and in the end turned away without so much as a glance in her direction.

In various parts of the ground there were coconut shies. One youth of about twenty years of age, vicious-looking and flashily dressed, stood out from the rest. He had a horribly inflamed left eye and a complexion of unwholesome pallor. He took no notice of anyone, but was watched by a large and admiring retinue. At almost every throw, and he hurled his ball with all his force and amazing skill, he dislodged a nut, and sometimes two. He would then stoop down to a store of them that lay in front of him, shake four or five to test the supply of milk within, and, having made his choice, hand the winnings to the bodyguard who waited behind. When he had done this, say, half a dozen times, he would pass on to the next booth and the same procedure would be followed. I did not like this young man. His meretricious and unhealthy appearance, his utter want of gaiety, his callous indifference to all about him, the professional manner in which he overthrew the coco-nuts without in the least

enjoying the game, left an unpleasant impression. And I noticed that the proprietors of the stalls looked at him from under their lids and, contrary to their usual practice, said nothing.

Far different were the feelings aroused by the merry-go-round dedicated to the children of two or three years apiece, who had been brought by their mothers or fathers, or an elder brother or sister. Some were seated on wooden ponies, very near the ground, and holding on to their enormous manes; others, even too young for that, were in miniature chariots, with only their heads peeping out. A hobbledehoy was in charge and regulated the pace according to the age of his clients. They were so young, so small, these mites, that they had no idea of danger. It was only a colossal treat, an adventure without parallel. Some were solemn, others enchanted. One small girl of two, seated on a pony and clutching an upright with both hands, smiled at her father each time she came round, a proud, confident, daring smile, such as might be seen on the face of a woman after some successful crisis in her fate. There was a serious little boy, seemingly even younger, on a pony with a prodigious tail. He sat there portentously grave, looking neither to right nor left, whirling round, thinking, I daresay, that he must comport himself with dignity under the eyes of so many of the other sex. It was the best thing in the Feast.

One other side-show in this carnival I especially recollect, for it introduced an alien note. Not far from the entrance, behind one of the stalls and withdrawn a little from the turmoil of the fair, a


wholly different entertainment was in progress. A wan-looking female, her grey locks loose and floating about her shoulders, was sitting bareheaded under a small canopy, blindfold and in charge of a tall, lean fellow in a dingy tail-coat and black wide-awake. Another man in a cap, loose-limbed and haggard, stood inside the circle of spectators, whispering some remarks to the former. These could not be heard by the onlookers, but their purport was soon made plain, as the man in the wide-awake repeated them in an ingratiating manner to the woman in the chair: "This gentleman, my dear, has a wife who's got an internal complaint. He wants to know whether she will get well. It seems he has had an awful time with her. Now, can you give him any news as to the future? Do your best, my dear." The prophetess rested her chin in her hand, pondered for a space, and then made answer in measured, rather hollow tones: "She will get well, but should be kept from worrying. She has had a lot of trouble lately." "Is that all you can say, my dear?" asked the man in the wide-awake. "Yes, that's all I'm allowed by the spirit to say." "You hear what she says, sir. That's all she's allowed to say—sixpence, please"; and the man in the cap handed over his money and, with downcast face, slipped away. Why the Sibyl should have been blindfold I cannot guess, for she was presumably a stranger to the neighbourhood and unacquainted with either husband or wife. Perhaps it was intended to impart an air of good faith to the proceedings, and if the fellow who had paid his sixpence drew any satisfaction from the imposture,

what did it matter if the business was a farce? It is hard to believe that those standing round did not know pretty well that it was all humbug; yet several others, while I was there, paid their pence to hear what she would say. Or had she been there before and some of the predictions come chancely true? What surprised me most was the way in which one or two of those present disclosed certain intimate misfortunes without apparently the slightest feeling of shame or self-consciousness.

The unrelenting din was beginning to get upon my nerves. The brutal cacophony of contending jazz, the clangour of machinery, the yells of the riders, the reports of the rifle-shots—this bombardment of discordant noise, never paused for a single moment. So I turned to go. Under one of the loud-speakers, almost grazed by a whirling round-about, rested a perambulator, and in it a babe, fast asleep. No one seemed to be in charge. There it lay alone, with all this fearful hubbub round it, its tiny angel face steeped in divine calm. So, too, amid the hurly-burly of life can some be at peace, when storms are raging about them and the Furies seem to be conspiring to founder their little craft.

The moon was now up and the whole heaven dusted with stars. As I walked home across the fields the sounds of the merry-making grew fainter, until they were heard no more. Peace had descended upon the landscape, the peace of sleeping Nature. All living things were hushed and still. Motionless were the blades of grass, the rushes of the pond, the lime leaves, the very gossamer—all sunk in dreams. Could they ever wake from so deep a trance, or was

this the final sleep from which there would be no awakening, the peace, everlasting peace that the soul of man craves for, but can never find? The noise of the feast, was that a dream, too, but a different one, equally unreal? The racket of the fair and the spell-bound quiet of this enchanted evening seemed to melt into one—a fairyland of unsubstantiality, the illusion of an hour.



XII

THE POINT-TO-POINT

IT is the day of the point-to-point, the seal to be set upon the season that is just over, the yearly gala of the famous pack that has hunted the district for a hundred years. All but the hounds will be there. What a crowd there is on the roads converging on the stretch of country where the races are to be run. Motor cars of every description, for rich and poor, two-seaters, four-seaters, seven-seaters, charabancs, also motor cycles, push-bikes, grooms leading horses, pedestrians on their own, whole families walking together, traps, perambulators. The tents are vivid in the sun and the voice of a great multitude rises on the air. The farmers' luncheon has just taken place in one of the marquees, and you can hear the laughter and the cheering of the Master's speech. As you draw near the entrance you can catch the very words:

'Let me say at once that no one has had more loyal support than myself during the past season. Everyone knows that fox-hunting is more difficult than it used to be when I was young.' ('You're not so old, sir.') 'Estates have been sold and split up for building and there's more wire about. Wire's done more harm to hunting than anything. It's the very devil. Farmer Brace set a fine example

last season, gentlemen, as you all know. Every bit of wire was taken down off a thousand acres of land. (Cheers.) It is in that spirit that we must face the future.' ('Good old Brace.') 'Take the poultry fund again. Your Secretary has had fewer complaints this season than for many years, although foxes have been more plentiful. If it hadn't been for one big claim for compensation, I won't mention any names' ('We know him'), 'we should have paid out less than for any year I can remember. I repeat, gentlemen, there's a good spirit animating the hunt. The hunt is popular.' ('So are you, Jack.') 'I take no credit to myself. We have as fine a staff and as sporting a lot of fellows as any hunt in the country. Only two hounds were kicked the whole season, and there have been very few complaints of riding over crops or leaving gates open. As long as we have support like this we can go on. We want to show you sport, gentlemen, and shall do our best to keep down the foxes. I may mention that the strain of hounds has been improved. We got six couple from the Garridge Kennels last year and gradually we hope to show you as fine a pack as any in the Shires. May I say one word about the ladies?' (Cheers.) 'We are always glad to see them out with us.' ('God bless them.') 'In these days of women's votes you may yet find yourselves with a lady master of hounds. (Loud laughter.) I don't think I've got anything more to say. I'm no orator. (Cries of dissent.) I'm happier in the saddle than on my feet.' ('Good old Jack!') 'Well, good luck to all of you and thank you.' (Prolonged and vociferous cheering.)

A little later and the bookies are shouting the odds for the first race. They are drawn up in a long line with their stock-in-trade erected behind them. One or two of them will be welshers before the day is over. Those with hoardings fitted with brass are reputed to be the safest to deal with, but even the brass has been left behind on occasions, all but the clients'. The ground in front of the bookies and round the extempore paddock is now a seething mass of men and women, boys and girls. A tipster, with a face stamped with roguery, has collected an audience and is urging it to back the winner:

'I have come all the way from Newmarket, ladies and gentlemen, where I am well known. I have come to win some money for myself, as well as for you. Look at those fat fellows, the bookies, standing there. You don't suppose they've come here to get sunburnt. No, they've come here to get your money. But I'm going to win their money to-day, and if you follow my advice you'll win it, too. I'm a tipster. They know me in Newmarket as "Mr. Butler in the know." What I don't know, ladies and gentlemen, about horses is, as they say at Newmarket, not worth knowing. I know a horse's form from his tail to his whiskers. A horse has three hundred and sixty-six bones in his body and he can't leave any behind in his box; he's got to win with all of them. He's got to be fit. I've known people, there may be some here to-day, who don't know what to back. They don't know what a horse looks like when he's got a cold. Well, I've seen two horses in this race to-day who have got colds and they can't win, even with smelling-salts, and some of you are going to

back them. I say, don't. Those fat fellows standing there want you to. Oh, no, they've not come here to get sunburnt. I am going to have four quid on this race and I am going to make twenty pounds. If I had backed horses with colds I shouldn't have got a balance at Barclay's Bank to-day and a house at Newmarket.'

A little farther on a three-card-trick man is trying to induce the unwary to spot the winning card. The police know all about him, but have been told to be lenient and are letting him have a run, though they move him on from time to time. He is surrounded by three or four confederates, brutal-looking ruffians with faces streaked with vice, who pretend to think him a clumsy performer whose winning card can be detected every time, and who, in order to encourage the hesitant, win large sums of money with the greatest ease. A middle-aged country-woman is beguiled in this fashion to try her luck and immediately loses a one-pound note. Near by, a number of people are gathered round a man who stands at a table with a whirling brass basin containing dice. The table is divided into six squares representing a crown, an anchor, a spade, a club, a heart, and a diamond—'Put your money on. This is the Derby game, the game that won the war. I like your company, but I like your money more. That's right, lady, put it on the hook. The anchor is the symbol of love, steadfast and true. Here's a gentleman likes a heart. Oh, he's a knowing one, he is. Plenty on the club and the spade, something on the hook and the crown, a little on the heart, nothing on poor old diamond.

Ah! something at last for the old man.' All the dice turn up diamonds and the genial scamp rakes in the whole of the money on the board. He, too, has a confederate who with expressionless persistence stakes a couple of half-crowns at every turn, generally winning and presumably returning the money to the banker between the races.

The first race is just about to start. The bookies are shouting 'six to one bar two,' and you have to lay the odds if you want to back the favourite. Now they are off, that is, the horses, over the line of country which with much care and forethought has been flagged and prepared for to-day's trial. What an exhilarating spectacle! Fifteen of them, ridden by familiar figures, some of them the owners, in black coats and pink ones, charging the first fence together. It is a varied and charming landscape over which they have to gallop, up and down hill, skirting coverts, over ditch and hedge and water, keeping to the left of the red flags until they finish between a dense avenue of shouting and excited onlookers. The odds-on favourite has been beaten and an outsider has won. What glory for this youngster with all his family looking on from a farm-cart drawn up not far from the judge's stand. His name is bandied from mouth to mouth. He is the hero of the moment to some who do not know him, and for many a long day to those who love him best. As he saunters back along the line of wagons that hold the families of the neighbouring squires and mounts into his own, several tender glances light upon him from melting eyes, for not only is he gallant, but an eldest son, heir to an estate, and

one day to be a hot favourite in the Matrimonial Stakes.

Between the races friends, acquaintances, relations fgather. It is a notable day for the district. The riders are, most of them, well-known local hunting men. All the farmers are there and their labourers. Many of the latter have earned a shilling or two opening a gate, or holding a horse during the past season. Nearly everyone present has some personal interest in at least one of the races. The Squire is riding or the Squire's son, or the land-agent, or farmer A, or the farmer's son, or the local vet. Each horse is known, too, and his form in the hunting field remembered to a nicety. Almost every rider has his family present, his household, his personal friends, those who know him most intimately in the district where he lives, and those in turn bring their friends to see him ride. Such a day makes the hunt popular with every class. Cottagers forget the loss of poultry from the foxes. Squires who do not hunt forgive the ravages among the pheasants. Farmers condone the trampling of their fences and the injury to their crops. It is the day that more, perhaps, than any other in the year embodies for them all the spirit of English country life—the free and easy mingling of the classes, the love of sport, the pride felt in old territorial families, the affection for scions of an ancient name, the knowledge of horseflesh, the gambling instinct, the devotion to home environment and familiar rural scenes. The line of farm wagons, especially, represents old England there to-day. For the nonce they are the landed estates of the neighbourhood drawn up in line, a microcosm

of the territorial families. What a hard task it has been for the last twenty years to keep these estates together, almost a superhuman one. What searchings of heart, what sacrifices, what sleepless nights and anxious days, what sales, sometimes unadvertised, of pictures, jewellery, furniture, timber, outlying farms, have taken place to enable the owner to hold on and pass the estate to his successor. Some of these properties have come down through centuries. The owners have become identified with the history of the neighbourhood, its traditions, its character, its sorrows, and its joys. Several estates are almost on their last legs. The gates and fences are falling to pieces, no painting has been done for years, and the tiles are slipping off the roofs. But the family clings to the old heritage, hoping for a turn in the wheel of fortune, and the tenants, not wishing to break the tradition, put up with the dilapidations and abstain from pressing the landlord for repairs, knowing full well that they in turn will not be pressed for the rent should bad times overtake them. At one end of the line of wagons the greatest of the local families is stationed; a noble one, rooted in the soil of this eastern county for the last three hundred years. They occupy two large wagons, for their house-party is a big one. The present owner of the estate married late in life a beautiful young woman thirty years his junior and she is standing in the cart radiant and lovely. Unfortunately there are no children of the union, and the property will go to a younger line.

The third event, the Adjacent Hunt Farmers' Race, has now been run. One of the horses in it

broke its shoulder and had to be destroyed, while a youth fell at the first fence and got slight concussion, for the ground is as hard as iron owing to the drought. But this is all in the day's sport and adds to the danger and therefore to the excitement. What a care-free crowd it is. To-morrow, but for some scraps of paper and a few empty tents, not a trace will be left of all the fun. So let us make the most of it. One section of the ground is black with motor cars, packed as thick as bees. In front of the bookies are serried ranks of jostling human bodies, men and women waiting to be paid. By the paddock the winner of the last race is examining his mount, surrounded by a host of admiring friends. It has been a popular win, for the secretary of the Hunt is liked by everyone, and as he passed between the lines of shouting spectators, leading by a couple of lengths, even the mounted Hunt servants, who were keeping the course clear, cracked their whips and halloed him to victory.

There is now only one more race, the United Hunts Heavy Weight. The horses are lined up, eager to start. There are ten of them. A tall man is on a restive bay. He has a keen and handsome face, and sits his mount with the ease and grace of mastery. He is Captain X., the agent of the great property belonging to the noble family whose wagons we have just seen. He is riding a horse called 'The Joker,' and The Joker is favourite. During the saddling a large crowd had collected to watch the final touches, the rinsing of the horse's mouth, the sponging of the nostrils, the tightening of the girths. 'Hobbledehoy' is there too, black,

nearly seventeen hands, and with great powerful shoulders, The Joker's only danger. Now they are off. No, it is a false start. The starter cannot get them into line owing to a horse in the centre that is barging about from side to side. The flag falls at last. They are off this time for better or worse. The approach to the first fence as well as the landing side bristle with spectators and the horses make a fine show as they charge it slightly down hill and clear it together almost abreast. Between the first and second fences several of them drop behind. Hobbledchey is over the second jump first, but The Joker is well up. The horses now settle down into their stride for the two and three-quarter miles in front of them. What a gallant picture they and their riders present galloping below the brow of the hill towards the covert side, dappling the green turf with their bright colours. They are now strung out. Blood and condition are beginning to tell. They have finished half the course. The Joker is lying third, Hobbledchey is second and an outsider is leading, but he pecked badly at the last fence, and his rider has obviously to push him along. The crowd is now becoming ever more interested. Before the next jump is reached, the leader falls behind into second place and shortly afterwards into third. The Joker and Hobbledchey are the only two that matter now. They are half a mile from home with three more fences in front of them, stiff ones, well ribbed up, stakebound and almost as hard as a post-and-rails. The Joker is a couple of lengths behind Hobbledchey, and going beautifully, untired, galloping freely and with lots of reserve.

Hobbledehoy is going well, too, but The Joker is taking his fences more gracefully and with more to spare, and is still the favourite. At two fences from home they are abreast. The excitement of the crowd has now reached its highest pitch. Both horses are stretched to the utmost. First one of them pushes a head in front, then the other. The onlookers are shouting wildly—'The Joker leads'—'Good old Joker'—'Go it, my lad'—'The Joker wins, I tell you.'—'The Joker wins.' As they approach the last jump The Joker leads by half a length. What a race! The crowd is in a state of delirium. The Hunt servants and police can scarcely keep the people back. They are a surging throng of shouting and gesticulating men and women, straining to catch a glimpse of the finish. 'The Joker has it in his pocket'—'A hundred to one on The Joker'—'Hobbledehoy's beat'—'The Joker's got it'—'The Joker'—'The Joker'—'The Joker'—yell the crowd. Every ounce of speed and energy is being extracted from the two horses and they can do no more. The Captain looks like a daemonic force almost lifting his mount along. He is grim and pale, staring fixedly ahead. Now for the last fence. The two riders charge it together, with The Joker's head just in front. Another hundred yards and the race will be over. Another half-minute and the shouting will have died down. One more supreme effort and the tension will be past. Ye Gods, what a race! The two horses rise together at the jump, but The Joker's luck has broken. Something has given way, some nerve or muscle or slender articulation in that splendid body. He crashes

against the top of the fence and turns a complete somersault with his rider underneath. A gasp goes up from the throng of people. The ambulance men rush out and drag the struggling horse aside, but the rider lies quite still. A doctor soon appears upon the scene and kneels beside him, feeling him all over, legs, arms, chest, and head. The limp body is then placed upon a stretcher and carried away through silent and sympathetic crowds. What can be the matter? Is it concussion or broken bones? Alas, the news soon spreads like wildfire. That vivid life has been snuffed out, in an instant, without warning, in its prime and virile beauty. The gallant Captain has ridden his last race.

Gloom descends on everyone, voices are hushed, faces are serious. It is a tragic ending to so bright a day, for he was esteemed and loved. The crowds gradually disperse, sadly and in silence, the huge assemblage of motor cars breaks up into its separate units and moves away in snakelike lines along the different roads, the bookies have taken down their boards, the horses, stablemen, house-parties, police, have all departed. The light is now rapidly waning and everything is tranquil. The last stragglers have left the field. The moon comes out and silvers over the deserted scene, the row of wagons, the empty tents, the fatal fence and the quiet country-side. The point-to-point is over.

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XIII

THE BIRDS

I

I YEARN for a little house in a wood far from mankind. Very few rooms would suffice. I would not stay in it all the year round, but would go there when the spirit moved me. The charm would be to escape from men, to see no more of them, not a human being, for a space. How one loathes one's kind from time to time—the able men, the stupid ones, those on the make, the hypocrites, the cranks, the well-meaning bores, the sloths, lizards, slugs, goats, and beasts of prey.

This little house, this cottage in the woods, would be my paradise on earth, its quietude broken only by the song of birds, the breezes in the tree-tops, the pattering of rain, or in rougher seasons, the thunder, hail, and hurricane. There would I live, absolved from all duty, free to sleep or wake, to write or walk—the fetters of convention, of human intercourse, of personal history left behind me. Such a cottage I have dreamt of all my life. I shall never have it now, never, not in this life—perhaps elsewhere, some transcendental habitation outside time and space. Or will there come a day when I shall break bounds, all of a sudden, desperately, and slip the leash? I

want to get away from human faces, and all the artificial masks that people wear. How I hate the human voice and the garb of human flesh. What animals we are, yet pretending not to be animals, like monkeys that have been taught to sit at table. What conglomerates of greed, false pride, vanity, smugness, partiality, prejudice, humbug, make-believe. It is from these that I want to free myself for a little before I die.

II

The cottage I have in mind stands in a large clearing of a wood, at one corner of it and facing south, so that it is sheltered from the inhospitable north and gets all the warmth and light that an English sun can give it. There is no garden. You walk out of the front door into ling and grass and wild flowers, and all around you are forest trees. A small lake nestles in another corner of the clearing just within the wood, reedy, secret, and still. Teal breed there, and in and out of the fringing rushes water-hen peep and fuss. There are fish, too, that swim in its lazuline depths, and burnished dragon-flies dart across its surface.

The trees are mostly oak, but there are other kinds as well. A majestic group of beech not far off, carpeted with the leaves of yesteryear, with mossy limbs and foliage of a bright glaucous green; Scotch firs, too, with their scabrous boles, ferruginous in the evening light, also chestnut, holly, larch, and ash. But my favourites, with one exception, are the delicate silver birches with argent

stems and plummy crests, like knights in shining armour.

The one exception is the old yew, vast and swart, that stands near the cottage door, stretching out an arm over a portion of the roof. I am fonder of it than of any, partly because of all the history it has witnessed, partly because of its unchangeableness. It is a refuge for small feathery things during wintry nights, and the golden-crested wren hangs its nest from its branches in the spring. It is of iron, not wood, and you would blunt your knife if you tried to carve your name upon its indurated trunk. Hard by is a stack of faggots, and a family of stoats have made it their home. They run in and out of the sun, beautiful and blood-thirsty, graceful and cruel, dreadful in pursuit of their prey, tracking it down yard by yard, never halting, hour after hour, until the victim, paralysed by terror, waits for the onrush, and offers itself to the razor teeth. And the birds are legion. There are scarcely any favourites here. They are all beloved, every one of them, from the hoarse rook winging his way to some ancient, honourable domain, to the dapper wagtail, with his little hurrying steps. Perhaps the lullaby of the wood-pigeons I love best of all. There is peace in that dulcet sound, soothing, blessed peace, the peace of things epichorial, of moss and lichen, fern and leaf, of woody silences and grassy glades. It almost makes one weep to think of it, tears of longing, of remembrance of the days when one roamed as a lad from covert to covert or lay with hands beneath one's head, gazing up at the amaranthine sky through interlacing boughs. And then there is the air here,

so sweet, pure, invigorating, uncontaminated by the sooty breath of cities, odorous of soil and herb and sappy bark, and filling the lungs with all the essences of growing life.

III

It was while thinking thus that I was reminded of a story. . . . An old gentleman had taken a cottage in the country. He had been a widower, and had married again, when seventy years of age, a beautiful and comparatively young woman. Within two years of this union she had left him and run off with a captain in a cavalry regiment whom she had known as a girl. Disgusted by this freak of fortune, the husband had determined to retire from the public eye and bury himself in some retired spot where he would no longer be reminded of the world he had known and which had known him. The cottage was a lonely one, somewhere in the southern counties, and an elderly couple of whom the husband had formerly been his valet, looked after his un-exacting wants.

Throughout his life, indeed, almost up to the time of his second marriage, this man had been one of the most famous shots in the country. When he was yet a boy he would practise with his small-bore gun upon the swallows and finches that haunted the eaves and the garden at home, and his chief delight in those early days, when he returned from school at the end of each term, was to lie in wait for the birds and get as big a bag as possible. He had once, in a single evening, shot no fewer than twenty

swallows on the wing, and one spring morning had killed a dozen larks. No garden had finer fruit. Not a blackbird nor a thrush was left to eat it or to sing. It is not surprising that his reputation spread apace. When he came of age the tenants subscribed and presented him with a brace of guns by Purdey, and from that moment invitations to shoot poured in upon him from every quarter of the county. For two or three years he shot several days a week throughout the pheasant and partridge season, beginning on September the first and firing his last cartridge in the expiring light of the first of February. Then he started to make war upon the grouse on the twelfth of August, thus extending by over a fortnight the period during which he could indulge the greatest pleasure of his life.

But there was another opportunity to deal death to winged creatures, which he had hitherto neglected. He began to visit the rookeries of the neighbourhood in the month of May, when for the good of these sable commonwealths the young rooks were thinned out by the farmers, and hundreds, nay thousands of the callow fledglings fell to his amazing dexterity with gun and rifle. He was now occupied for over six months of the year in this holocaust of bird life—May, half of August, September, October, November, December, and January.

The civility shown him by the gunsmiths who supplied him with ammunition and other requisites for this increasing slaughter was almost pathetic in its eagerness. They even remembered his birthdays, sending him match-boxes made of empty cartridge-cases, diaries, cartridge-extractors, and other such

trifling attentions, free of cost. His friends, too, were not behindhand. Scarf-pins in the form of pheasants' heads, cigarette-cases engraved with flying coveys, sleeve-links in the shape of gun-barrels, shooting-sticks, and game-books were presented to him on various festive anniversaries. And when he married his first wife one of the wedding-gifts that figured prominently among the rest was a large oil-painting of shattered birds falling through the air amid a cloud of feathers.

After his marriage he added duck-shooting to his programme, and thus obtained six more weeks for the satisfaction of an absorbing passion. His reputation was now immense. He fired off several hundred thousand rounds every year, and frequently went shooting with three guns, a couple of loaders crouching behind him, slipping in the cartridges as hard as they could. The barrels used to get red-hot, and on one occasion he had no fewer than four birds falling through the air at the same moment. There was not time to see where or how they fell. It was the bag that mattered and the number of hits. Estimates were made by experts of what the ratio was of deaths to explosions, and it was reckoned higher in his case than in that of any other sportsman in the land. No calculations, however, were forthcoming of the proportion of maimed and wounded to those that escaped scot-free. With such a sure and deadly certainty of aim there cannot have been many of the little aeronauts fired at that did not feel the smart of at least one pellet.

IV

There were still, however, considerable periods left during which our Nimrod had nothing to do. The killing of birds was his only interest and occupation. He thought of nothing else, could talk of nothing else. His whole existence was subdued to this particular pastime. His diet, his exercise, his hours of sleep were all regulated by the one essential consideration of how to keep in the fittest possible condition for the pursuit of this sport. The *Field* was his favourite paper, and a volume of the 'Badminton Library' his favourite book. His favourite dish was a bird of some kind, and the whole house was a cemetery of stuffed specimens. One room was stacked with guns, of almost every bore and type; and on wet days he would take them from their cases and oil and run them through himself.

The problem of March and April still remained, as well as that of June and July—four calendar months in which he was at a loose end, without a single resource in the world. He happened to be at his gunsmiths' one day, when they suggested a solution for half these wasted days. The pigeon-shooting at Monte Carlo was the best in the world. Pigeons there were released from traps in view of the finest marksmen in Europe—Russians, Jews, Americans, Poles, Englishmen, Austrians, Frenchmen, Armenians, and Germans. From this time forward he spent March and April regularly on the Riviera, and killed enormous numbers of these pigeons, scattering their ruby blood upon the terraces below.

The visitors to the Casino frequently complained of the fluttering birds that almost fell at their feet, bleeding and dying, but the income derived by the authorities from the sport was too large to induce them to forgo it. Our Englishman on several occasions won the highest obtainable prize for the greatest number of hits, and gave dinners to his fellow-sportsmen to celebrate the victories.

He was now shooting birds without intermission during ten months of the year, almost every day, with the exception of Sundays, from the beginning of August to the end of May. What he did during the remainder of the year, in the months of June and July, we never exactly heard, except that he was noted for the destruction of 'vermin,' whenever he had sufficient time to give to it—owls, jays, magpies, hawks, crows, and jackdaws, which had not the privilege of a close season and were reputed to be enemies of preserved game. Indeed, in his own neighbourhood a barn owl, a kestrel, or a jay was almost as rare a bird as a bustard or a golden eagle.

By the time his second wife had arrived upon the scene, the multitude of birds he had killed with his own gun was almost unbelievable. He had kept an exact record in a series of yellow morocco volumes, and the number was close on a million. Pheasants, partridges, grouse, woodcock, snipe, duck, plover, blackcock, ptarmigan, capercailzie, rooks, pigeons, jays, magpies, hawks, owls, jackdaws, and crows, to say nothing of the swallows, doves, larks, linnets, thrushes, blackbirds, and every kind of songster that he had brought down in their thousands in his

earlier days. The numbers of wounded that had crept away to die or had lived on maimed must also have been colossal.

v

But he was now an old man, and by the time he had migrated to the cottage was feeble on his legs, and his eyesight was failing. He stayed in bed as a rule until late in the morning, and his only exercise was to toddle in fine weather to a clearing in the woods about half a mile from the house.

One summer's day he went out and never returned. The manservant had been to a neighbouring village and did not get back till late in the afternoon, and his wife had taken no steps to find her master. The valet, when he heard of it, set off at once along the route which his employer always followed, until he arrived at the clearing in the wood. But here he was met by a sight which, trained and hardened as he was, nearly made him swoon. There lay the old gentleman upon his back, his face a bloody, unrecognizable mass of torn flesh, and both his eyes plucked out. He had apparently crawled over fifty yards from where he first fell, for there was a continuous trail of blood and feathers all the way, feathers of every kind of bird—rook, hawk, owl, pheasant, pigeon, to the smallest species of all. Several of the lesser birds lay dead, killed by lashing arms as the old man in agony had tried to defend himself.

The feathered world had at last obtained and savoured their revenge. They had set upon him with beak and claw in their hundreds, taken him at

a disadvantage, suddenly, without warning, when he was alone, old and feeble, had pecked out both his eyes, pierced their sockets to the brain, and made his face one raw wound. Even his hands were torn deliberately by powerful beak and claw until the bone of the knuckles could be seen through the flesh. His ears were nearly torn off, and only a portion of his scalp remained. Not a living bird was to be seen or heard—the place was still as death; and some farm-hands carried him back, with his head under a sack, to the old woman who was getting his dinner ready. . . .

This was the story that was told me, and as I thought of the cottage of my dreams I made up my mind that the woods about it should be a bird-sanctuary. The pheasant would preen his splendid plumage unmolested, the stare would nest in the eaves, the owl's shuddering cry haunt the night, and the singers in the hazel-copse warble their loves unafraid of man or boy. It would be an asylum, a retreat of peace and safety, for every feathered thing, from the heron watching by the lake's brim to the minute wren, that tiny bobbin of fluff that chirrups outside my bedroom window. They would all be sacred, inviolate, every one of them—for are they not sentient, passionate, understanding creatures, heralds from a world more ethereal than our own, and apparelled in such beauty, of a grace so inimitable, with an utterance so appealing, that man and all his works seem commonplace and lifeless as we gaze upon and marvel at these spirits of the air?

XIV

THE RIVER

WHEN I am feeling morose or dispirited I betake me to the margin of a certain river. It is broad and swift-flowing, and that part of the bank where I like to pace is steep and unfrequented. You look down upon the water which winds like a broad band of quicksilver to the right and left, and you gaze across it to the other side, where the busy life of a great city is in progress. It is ever-changing; never is it the same. It has its moods and vagaries like a human being. It can rage or be full of tears, can smile and laugh, be dignified and majestic, full of pomp and circumstance, or shrink almost to insignificance. I have seen it at flood, threatening, catastrophic, with its primitive instincts all unleashed, and men flying from it in terror. At other times you could almost wade across it, a narrow strip of water trickling through a vast expanse of mud, unpretentious, apologetic even, as though not willing to court observation for fear some sudden suction from above or below might dry it up altogether. To understand the river you must be often with it, in summer and winter, in fair and foul weather, at high and low tide, in boisterous wind, and when there is not a breath of air; when it is bathed in sunlight and shrouded in mist; when it is

riding to the sea with crested waves and swollen mass; when it is smooth as glass and almost still; when it is black as basalt and when Heaven's blue is reflected in it. You must see it in the early morning and at sunset, at night under the moon, when you are sad or hopeless, or when fortune has played you one of her scurvy tricks. And visit it too in health of mind and body, when your joy of living will be responsive to the great soul of the stream:

'Sweet Themmes! runne softly, till I end my Song.'

You can never pick out one of its phases and say, 'That is the genuine river—the river itself, undisturbed and unattended by adventitious circumstance.' You cannot say to-day, 'This is the very spirit of the river,' and to-morrow, 'I would hardly know it—it is not itself'—for whatever shape it assumes it is always the river of your thoughts and your delight, changing but ever changeless, with its whims and caprices, yet retaining its personality throughout the years. Even at the lowest tide when it seems but a shadow of its former self, you realize its power and destructive force. There is a quarter of a mile of lonely walk along the ridge of the steep bank where I love to pace. Up and down it you can go, savouring the river-smell that assails your nostrils when you face the wind. It was only the other evening when it seemed to run a mere rivulet amid the broad flats on each side. Gulls were standing on the mud or sailing overhead, and their

screams filled the air. There was a great black-backed fellow, with powerful stroke and splendid stretch of wing, solitary, hunting for its food alone; another kind with black head and hoarse cackling cry, and yet a third with beautiful white neck and pearl-grey body, turning and tossing with buoyant grace. Peaceful was the scene and you almost forgot the surge of the irresistible torrent which you had witnessed only the day before. But the debris littering the mud and flung high against the bank was there to remind you—spars, broken branches, baskets, tins, boxes, barrel-hoops, bottles, bones, boots, rags, a shattered and pathetic medley. For this silver thread was one of the highways of the world that scoured humanity, bearing upon its bosom the life of many a city on its passage to the sea.

Yes, it was only the day before that I had seen the great river in full surge and whipped by a high wind. On some days the gentlest of zephyrs crinkles its surface into delicate pleats, or a stronger breeze into larger undulating tresses like the waves of a woman's hair. But yesterday the water was tormented, lashed by a gale into crests of foam, until the smaller craft on the other side tossed and almost broke from their moorings. And ever and anon a fast tug, drawing a couple or so of barges in its wake, or a steamer, would add to the turmoil of the waters, raising a heavy wash that battled with the current and widened until it broke upon either bank. It was during this tempestuous weather that I watched a duck and her young setting out upon the endeavour to cross the river. So hazardous an adventure it seemed at the time that I cannot recall

it without wonderment, and I witnessed it then with my heart in my mouth, expecting the whole brood to founder at any moment. She had ten small chicks hardly bigger than bumble-bees, and, when I caught sight of her, was only a few yards from where I stood. Her children were clustered close behind and she was facing upstream. She seemed to be making for a point on the other side higher up the river, but so strong was the current, so furious the blast, so rough the surface of the water, that all she and they could do with all their efforts, was to drift across in almost a straight line. As they reached the middle of the river the water became even more broken. The little fledglings were now stretched out in a line behind her, struggling with might and main to keep in her wake. But she never turned her head. To all appearances unconcerned, she faced upstream with head erect, and whenever one of her young became too far detached from the main body, would cease paddling and with telepathic vision drift backwards with her brood until he had been once more gathered in. At one moment a tiny member of the group had, I thought, been lost for good. He appeared to be even smaller than the rest, and feebler. Yards began to separate him from the others, and it was pitiful to see his desperate and frantic efforts to recover the ground he had lost. Little by little he was borne back, fluttering and struggling, in an agonized attempt to join his mother. The cruel waves knocked him about, submerged him, tossed him hither and thither, and the pathetic struggle went on, the spirit within this atom of fluff trying to overcome the immensity of the forces

and dangers about it. Once only did the mother look back, when a despairing cry in the extremity of her child's peril may have reached her, a lightning glance, and once more she faced upstream. Then gradually she drifted backwards, back, back, till the little fellow was again a member of the tiny flock. You could see them expending all their strength to keep up with her, flung from side to side, as the wash of a boat or a fiercer gust than usual tore them from their course. It was the bravest adventure I ever saw, the most dangerous seemingly, the most enterprising, whose issue hung so often in the balance. Gradually as they passed over to the other side, I lost sight of them, first of the brood, then of the mother. As she drifted out of view she was well over the middle of the river, still facing unwaveringly upstream. There is but little doubt that they all got over safely. But what could have been the reason for taking such terrible risks? Were they flying from a still greater menace? Was their food upon the other side? Or was she, like a Spartan mother, bent upon testing the nerve of her offspring and tempering the steel of their spirit in the iron school of adversity? Who can tell?

Except for the gulls and the drumming of some distant machinery, the river is very quiet to-day. There is not enough water to carry the heavier craft which are waiting for the tide to turn. Dozens of boats of all sizes are lying on the mud and the scene has a deserted look. But, when the tide is in, the desolation is transformed into a spectacle of extraordinary animation. The river becomes a sentient, pulsing creature, working with a will,

transporting rapidly the goods and people it is called upon to carry. The slow, heavily laden barges are my favourites, massive, low-sunken in the water, grave, deliberate, unhurried, weighty with concerns of deep commercial import. Men live their whole lives in them, rear their families in them, practically never leave them, sometimes are born or die in them. You can see the children scampering over the closed hatches and the wife busy in the duties of her home, emerging sometimes from the cabin-door to flick a duster. What a colourful existence!—the roar of the great city about you, the endless procession of its towers and bridges, its churches and cathedrals, its vast warehouses and cranes, its wharves and palaces, its power-stations and enormous gasometers, its docks and shipping, its factories, parks, and slums. Yet what peace! for though you see and hear them; though you are amid them, you are not of them. You float in a world of your own, passing and repassing, disinterested spectators, familiar with all these sights and sounds, yet living your own life and removed from all their unrest by an impassable barrier that none can disturb. There are craft of every kind—motor boats, tugs, dinghies, police-patrols, canoes, one-masted sailing boats, one-funnelled steamships, pleasure-craft too, packed with sightseers and festooned with life-belts, plying their manifold affairs, some gay, others solemn, some beautiful with coloured sails, others drab and ungainly, but each of them with a personality of its own, and all dependent upon the good will of the river and strictly observant of its sacred rules.

How long ago it seems when, as a boy, I used to roam a certain wooded gully, tickling the trout in this self-same river, but miles away, just below its source! We were both in our infancy, the stream and I, inexperienced, irresponsible, without a care. We had seen nothing of the world and knew not whither we were tending. I used to leap across the little dancing brook and quench my thirst at its tiny waterfalls. Many a trout have I caught there. Lying on your face above the water, you bared your arm to the shoulder and quietly inserted your hand palm upwards in its cool current beneath some large stone. It was there that the trout loved to lie when the sun was hot. I got to know the particular kind of flat, dark rock, with sharp edges, hollowed out below, that they favoured most. You might try and try again in vain. At times they would be hiding in the bottom of the deeper pools, but of a sudden, under some miniature beetling crag, you would feel the smooth belly of a fish against your fingers. It required a good deal of delicate dexterity, for on the slightest disturbance of the water or any abrupt jerk or pressure, away he would flash like a streak of lightning and escape you. You had to caress him ever so lightly with the sensitive tips of your fingers, ever so patiently, without moving the rest of your hand or body. Sometimes he would shift his position a little and then you had to follow him up, but gradually he would become hypnotized by the stroking, lulled into a delicious trance, and you could then shepherd him by fractions of an inch at a time to the outer edges of his cavern. Little by little you would lift him too, nearer and nearer would you

coax him to the surface, and more and more within the hollow of your palm, and then without warning, with abominable, treacherous suddenness, you would jerk him out of the water on to the bank at your side. There he would lie struggling ineffectually, his beautiful scales radiant with light, until you put him in the can of water which stood ready for his reception. Often would I lose my prey through over-eagerness, before his senses had been sufficiently numbed. The lithe, brown body would then slither from beneath my hand and vanish in one of the deeper pockets where I could no longer reach it.

There were cataracts and shallows, rapids and deep channels in the little stream. It was the great river in its childhood, passing through an Eden of its own, seen by few human eyes but mine. Like myself, it was innocent, leaping, and laughing from step to step through the lush grasses, bounded by primrose-covered banks, unsullied, fed by a sweet and secret spring a mile or two away. To-day we are both older and more thoughtful. What experiences we have been through! How learned we have become in the ways of men! Life is much more complicated now, for alien streams have joined us and conventions and the interests of others hem us in. But sometimes the river remembers the days of its youth and for a brief spell breaks free, bursting the trammels put upon it, and causing surprise and anxiety to those who are ignorant of those leapings in the little wood. But I understand. It is the spirit of the beck not far from its source, the soul of youth, the memory of those early times and scenes, when it was racing with the trout and

laughing with the sun, and a boy of its own age ran beside it.

So here I come for companionship, on summer evenings and autumn afternoons; in high wind, blowing inland, when I get a tang of the sea; in driving rain, wrapped to the eyes in an oilskin; in winter when icicles hang along the river wall; on days in spring, when the skirting park and garden are full of growth and happy promise. To-day it is autumn, and Phineas, the gardener, who is working just below me, says we are in for a spell of dirty weather. He has been on the place for nearly half a century and so should know. There was an ugly story connected with him in his youth. He and his brother lived together in a cottage a few hundred yards up the river beyond the limits of my favourite walk. They had inherited their father's savings in equal shares and were both unmarried. One dark night they went out together in their little boat to lay down some lines, a thing however they had never done before at that season of the year. His brother, he told the police, had fallen overboard when reaching out too far, and so pitch-black was it that, although he rowed about for half an hour, he could see nothing of him and so returned. Anyway, next day the body was found, washed up two or three hundred yards down the river just below the spot where I was then standing. There were no marks of violence, save on one of his hands where two fingers had been crushed and the skin broken, but this might have been caused by some passing craft. His share of their father's fortune fell to Phineas, who went on living in the cottage as before. He

was now an old man, still unmated, a hard, greedy miser, disliked by everyone who knew him, but a good worker. One late afternoon in the previous December I was just about to bring my customary walk to a close, when I espied the old fellow in the gathering dusk climbing up a path that led from the garden down below to the top of the river bank. He looked furtively around and then stood above the spot where his brother's body had been washed ashore. For close on five minutes he stood there, motionless, as though carved in stone, gazing down at the edge of the water, and then, once more glancing furtively about him, descended whence he had come. Yes, the river has its dark secrets as well as its romance.

The tide is now slowly rising and the wind is getting up. It has grown late while I have thus ruminated, later than I thought. The pale river is filling, but is very still; the gulls have all departed; the great lantern of the sun is sunken low and burns in a lurid sky, and a shiver passes over me as I climb down the bankside and bend my footsteps home.

XV

HOLIDAYS

WHAT a feeling of ebullient jollity invades you when you place your foot upon the running-board of the *train de luxe* which is to transport you to that gambling, hope-inspiring resort where the shackles of routine can be shaken off and you can plunge your arm to the shoulder in the lucky dip of chance. Your pocket is bulging with foreign currency, and there await you at the bank of your destination a fat credit and the smiles of the cashiers.

What a lucky dog you think yourself, and what a panorama of promise opens before you. Luxury and adventure. What more could you or anyone want? All the staffs of your particular hotel, of the casino and restaurants, besides the host of porters, stewards, guides, couriers, bandsmen, chauffeurs, train attendants, shop-keepers and who not, line each side of an entrancing vista stretching away in front of you of subservience and bowing backs, all of them waiting to do your bidding, to smile at your vacuities, to humour your futilities, and encourage your frivolities—for a consideration. The anticipation is as good as a feast as you are hurled past wood and meadow and quaint old village, although you see them not.

And when you actually get there, to the end of

your journey, the goal of your desire, into the very heart and core of the delightful wickedness of the place, into the casino itself, and are reaping the harvest of all your imaginings for the previous month, what a care-free, colourful world you will have popped into. How different from the uneventful tramp of events at home. What dresses to be seen here; what fashion, what women; what loveliness and frailty; what excitement and naughtiness; what reckless profusion; what specimens of humanity to talk about to the country cousins—the expressionless masks of the croupiers, the rouged harpies, with eyes as hard as carbonado and hands like talons, the overfed male escorts, with pigs' eyes and thick, white fingers, paying for little friends a third of their age. What a carnival of worldliness, what a display of ripe experience, what a sample of real life you are witnessing, so you will report. And the food—what richness and flavour, what variety, what *hors-d'œuvre* and *chefs-d'œuvre*, what sauces and plenty of them, at any hour, day and night, amid the explosion of corks and the tinkle of cocktails and liqueurs. There never was such a place for obliterating the teasing memories of life at home, with its sodden outlook and wearisome monotony; for making a new man or woman of you, for enjoying a little up-to-date civilization in its quintessential freshness and perfection.

There is nothing here to remind you of death and disease, of pain and poverty. The waters of life run at full tide, covering the cruel rocks that would tear out the bottom of your little craft. Has Nature anything to show like this? The blazing lights, the

jewels, with their coruscating fires, rubies, diamonds, emeralds, and sapphires, how tame compared with all these are those dim and distant sentinels in heaven's firmament. Even the pearls have more lustre than the Milky Way. And behold the company you are keeping—statesmen, actors, generals, opera singers, prize-fighters, princes of commerce and captains of industry, courtesans, dukes, film-stars, admirals, artists, men of letters, beauties, ex-convicts, even princes of the blood. What a microcosm is here. What an *omnium gatherum* of the froth and dregs, of the cleverest and stupidest, the ugliest and most beautiful, of the wickedest and the innocent. It was worth coming all these leagues if there was nothing else to see.

And what a fortune there is within your grasp. The film-star won seven hundred thousand francs in twenty minutes and lost it again in a quarter of an hour. The prize-fighter is said to have taken one million eight hundred thousand francs away with him. Look at the man with the light-brown wig and long yellow fangs; he has a stack of notes and plaques in front of him worth twenty thousand pounds. Not long ago he was doing time for cheating the income-tax authorities, and now he is rubbing shoulders with a duchess, almost cheek by jowl, and she is smiling at him through her paint. The air is heavy with scent and human odour, for the windows must be kept closed. No outside breath or noise must percolate to disturb the concentrated passion of the game. Money is of no account here unless in hundreds of thousands. A thousand-franc note is tossed to the croupier for his own use, another

thousand to the man who ladles out the change. A few lucky hits and you can win enough to buy the finest castle in England. Under that pile of money is the best grouse moor in the kingdom, and the loveliest woman in London under the other. Can you beat it? Can anyone beat it for sheer, audacious, intoxicating living?

And then there is the music outside. Look at the fiddlers in this mad burst of speed. Mark the conductor, with his hair flying, and with whirling wand. Listen to the trumpets, 'cellos, drums, trombones, flutes, horns, double bass, piano, and violins. The greatest Teutonic master of modern times is giving you of his best. Here comes the crashing finale, all the pent-up action and passion of the piece gathered up and let loose upon you in a shattering cataract of wild notes. This is what makes the place what it is. It always has the best—the best orchestra, the best cooking, the best drinks, the best dresses, the best looks, the best casino. And everything moves at such a pace that you are never given time to be bored.

And when you have said good-bye to it all, when the waiters and chambermaids and valets and messenger-boys and commissionaires and hall-porters, and the various other functionaries that have ministered to you during your stay, have fleeced you and stripped you and squeezed you almost dry, and the train moves slowly out of the station, a pang of regret shoots through you at so much heartless and expensive folly left behind. You have lost money, it is true, more than you can afford; but you must pay for joys like these. You are as pale as

when you started and physically unrefreshed, but if it were not for the rackety nights half the fun would have been missed.

And so you get back home to the daily round, to the stolid looks and commonplaces of your native heath. The holiday is over. The fortnight now seems like a dream. You feel as though you had been in a vacuum, out of contact with realities, and this indeed is the case. That has been your relaxation, this elaborate artifice of make-believe, that so soon would have staled and nauseated. You have left behind a corner of the earth, exhausted of all duty and sympathy, a manufactured void, and have returned, so you now think, to the 'real thing,' to the fold of human society, with its drab integument, but with its labours, and its loves, its heart-beats and heart-aches, and its errors, its sacrifices, a palpitating organism fearfully and wonderfully made. You have returned just in time, as you quietly acknowledge to yourself.

But, dear reader, if you are such as I think you must be, there is another kind of holiday open to you. There are the hills and woods, the streams and pastures of your own land. With what a feeling of passionate longing will you set out on your voyage of discovery. Though you have been caught in the toils of mechanical servitudes far away from great silences, struggling to free yourself, as you did, bravely at first, then more feebly, at length not at all, there is within your reach, not very far from your doorstep, a world where all these chafing meshes in which you have been entangled will fall from you like a garment. How you yearn to enter this dream-

land even for a short while, to bathe in the waters of Lethe, to wash yourself clean.

It is harvest-time, and all England lies before you—the Wiltshire or the Sussex Downs, the Peak of Derbyshire and all the Midland Wolds, the misty Lakeland, the gardens of the South, the scarps and marshes of the East Coast. Every description of scenery is at your command—rolling plain or wooded summit, smooth meadows, silent forests, singing rivulet and broad river, sheltered valley and rugged tor. Here you can feast your eyes upon crumbling ruins where the masterful ivy is the only living tenant of their roofless halls, or ancient manor-houses still beloved and inhabited by the families that built them, or some straw-thatched hamlet, remote and half-forgotten, hidden in the folds of a green hill-side. All you need is opportunity, and this you have within your grasp. In God's name and old Chaucer's blunt words: 'Forth pilgrimme, forth beast out of thy stall!'

The mists of early morning are lying like a blanket upon field and hedgerow as you issue forth, and by whatever method of conveyance you may have chosen leave the still sleeping city of your daily tasks. You are free. With what a delicious freshness this cool and purer air invades your nostrils as the last chimney of your prison disappears from view. You are in a new world. On and on you go until every growing thing seems to put on an altered aspect, and the sun now risen in his glory, sheds his rays upon a reborn earth. On and on, until at length you are alone with Nature under the smokeless canopy of heaven and with the unadul-

terated soil beneath your feet. Great spaces stretch themselves endlessly before you; minutest grasses shimmer in the golden light, and you feel yourself gradually changing too. On you go until you surrender yourself to the alchemy of this fairy scene. You are becoming one with the trees and birds and scudding clouds. Your individuality is being sucked away. You feel yourself being absorbed little by little into a magical scheme, as yet unfolded, of which all these are but manifestations. You become immanent in them and part of their life. Your former personality has merged and been lost. The metamorphosis is complete. The spell of the Infinite has you in thrall. Traveller, you have at last arrived.

It is harvest-time, and below the slope on which you are standing a binder is at work cutting down the wheat. As soon as the sharp teeth have severed the blades, the ingenious mechanism gathers them into armfuls and, after knotting a piece of twine round each, deposits them in long regular lines. With what grave dignity the three horses pace as with slow and regular tread they plod abreast round and round their diminishing task. Their master is an expert, and, perched upon his narrow seat, guides them with a flick of the rein. His dog is in attendance, waiting for whatever may be lurking in the last stronghold of the standing corn, and his small son walks behind, taking a proud part in this penultimate ceremony ere the greatest fruit of the earth is safely stored. The splendid crop seems almost to know that it is doomed. The clustered grain weighs heavily on the long straw and bends

its head at the slightest stir of air. It is golden-brown, gilding the landscape with its deep burnish.

What a peaceful and beautiful scene it is. What labour has been lavished upon this plot of soil—the cleansing, fertilizing, and ploughing, the sowing and harrowing, and now the reaping, and to-morrow the gathering into stooks, and then the carting and the stacking. With what anxious pride these acres have been watched, when the skies have discharged their deluges, when the sun has hidden his face overlong, when the growth was nearly spoilt, when the ears would not ripen, when the hail beat them almost to the ground. Marvellously has the precious crop survived. Like a child has its parent loved it, and passed sleepless nights, grieving over its dangers and disappointments. It is almost part of his flesh. His sweat has watered it, and his hopes have woven themselves into its very fibre. It has now come to maturity, slowly and hazardously. What a bountiful gift it is to the human race. Here is food, thousands upon thousands of loaves of bread. Here is the vital necessity without which man cannot live. Little children will be nourished by you, and old men and lovers, and the rich and even the destitute, for they, too, must eat, and the sick and the hale. You are their life-blood, you glorious, glowing crop, bowing your golden head before your fate. A few more rounds and the man and his team will return home, for evening now begins to close in and the corn is almost down. See, the last swath has been cut. The dying daylight picks out the metal in the horses' harness as they move slowly away, turning it, too, to gold, and dwells for a brief

moment on the stricken sheaves. The field is now deserted. A solitary rook is flying homewards, and a string of duck is making for its feeding-grounds. In the distance you can hear the tinkle of a sheep-bell. Presently even this is hushed. As you linger amid the lines of the wheat its personality surges upon you. This is its Calvary and sacrifice. It is pregnant with destiny and seems to be aware of it as it lies about you waiting for the morrow. A great peace descends upon the darkening scene. The spirit of man and the soul of the wheat are one. The past, the present, and the future become fused, and as you turn aside from this hallowed ground, you feel that you are leaving part of your very self among the fallen sheaves.

The stage is now altered. All the morning you have been upon the Downs. You have drawn the unpolluted air deeply into your lungs and felt as though you could walk for ever. Since you left the smoke-encircled city of your home, your muscles have hardened and the skin of your face, hands, and neck has been burnt a deep brown, for the days have been unclouded and hot and you have often slung your coat over your shoulder and walked in your shirt-sleeves. Hundreds of sheep are grazing the smooth turf, in some places eaten down so closely as to be like the nap of a billiard-table. From the various vantage-points the surrounding country can be seen. Here you are alone with the sheep and the birds, but lower down in the dip, about half a mile away, sheltered by a few trees, lies a little homestead with its byre and farm buildings, and a field or two of roots and what looks like

barley. One of the charms of these Downs is their bird-life. The shyer denizens of the air are fond of them because of the solitude, for they can go about their business and pleasures without the haunting fear of man. The lapwing can rear her brood, untroubled by the constant dread of her eggs being trampled or her little ones disturbed by human hands, and the birds of prey can hunt their game with impunity. See, there is a hawk poised above you at this very moment. He spies some food which is hidden from your view—a mouse, a partridge, a young rabbit, or this year's missel-thrush; for he has a vision that envelops many thousands of square yards of landscape and has quartered the downs this morning for miles around. Every likely run, form, depression, tuft of grass or piece of scrub has been probed by those gimlet eyes and nothing has escaped them. This time there must be a succulent morsel below him, for he is hovering almost stationary over an object not far from where you are standing. He is well-nigh motionless, just a quiver of his powerful wings as he slightly shifts his position from time to time. Now he is swooping, ah! and has missed his quarry, for up he mounts again, once more poised and watchful against the deep sapphire of the sky. You have had a near call, you little animal, whoever you may be! This terrible pirate sees you still. He is merciless and hungry, and will fasten his cruel claws in your tender flesh yet unless you are very careful. The grace of his flight is irresistible. There is no wind, at least you are unaware of it down here, but up he rises on rigid pinion, buoyed by currents that you cannot feel.

He slides and pirouettes and curvets with the ease of perfect mastery, until the machinery devised by man for his airy flights seems as constrained and clumsy and mechanical as in comparison it is.

The sun's rays are now so fierce that you yearn for a little shade. They have beaten upon you for several hours, penetrating and cleansing the pores and cuticle of your town-infected body. To your right, on a plateau of its own, a wood is standing invitingly outlined against the blue. Is it beech or oak or spreading chestnut? It is too far yet to distinguish, but as you draw closer you perceive that it is composed of the oldest of our trees, the incorruptible English yew. He is an aboriginal, indigenous to the soil and almost indestructible by time. The wood is an inky blot upon the landscape, contrasting with the lighter patches of the surrounding country-side. You have now reached it after a slight ascent and fling yourself down upon the nearest shadow. Up here there is not a sound—no voice of bird or beast; you and the wood seem isolated from the rest of the world. It is divided up by a number of straight rides that must meet eventually in its midst, for after a rest you have circled part of it to get your bearings. And now you enter by one of the paths. Indeed, were it not for these, it would be a veritable labyrinth of blackness. Behold now a sight that you at least, poor treader of the pavements, have never before seen. Here is a forest of yew, naught but yew, with scarcely any undergrowth, and, but for an occasional window where some monster arm has drawn aside the curtain or an ancient titan has at length succumbed,

almost as dark as night. Every tree is a giant in girth, of immemorial age, gnarled, twisted, knotted, and as hard as iron, with a roof impenetrable by light or heat. Whatever may be transpiring outside is unknown and indifferent to them. They stand as they stood a hundred, two hundred, five hundred years ago. History has left no trace upon them. They have lived their own lives, and industrial, economic, social, and political revolutions might, so far as they are concerned, have never occurred. Kings and queens have died, manners have altered, new races have sprung up around them, bows and arrows have given place to machine-guns, but they have remained the same, and eventually will disintegrate and disappear through sheer old age, perhaps half a millennium hence, inaccessible to modernity and almost unassailable by change. As you stroll through this majestic gloom the centuries are piled around you. Here is a genuine fragment of the past, a piece of England which altereth not, steadfast and immovable; a piece of the future, too, for, God willing, naught for many a generation yet shall break your mighty limbs or sap the roots that feed you.

You have now arrived at the clearing in the midst of the wood where all the tracks converge. It is paved with a dazzling lawn-like turf, studded with minute white blossoms, and cropped close by the teeth of busy rodents. Although it is open to the sky and full of sun, it might be a thousand miles from any human habitation. Not a sound is here, nothing to disturb this everlasting peace, naught but the silent janitors that ring it round and the

hyacinthine vault above it. But look a little closer and you will perceive that it is full of light, teeming in fact with myriads of pulsing beings, insects of every shape and colour, that each in pursuit of its own purpose helps to people the jungle of this shining grass. It is a vast camp in ceaseless quest, formed of many races and peoples, and driven by some imperative urge of which you can only guess the nature. Look, for instance, at that little beetle, half aeronaut and half pedestrian, that shelters its diaphanous wings beneath a carapace of glinting blue; or again this small green cricket, that by means of the astonishing development of its quarters has just leapt, for you have measured the distance, more than ninety times its own length; or this dancing azure butterfly, tacking from side to side and up and down, and which not the swiftest bird can capture on the wing; or this little copper-coloured ant, member of an ordered commonwealth, that is diligently searching, searching, searching, indefatigably active, as it runs and pries and pries again; or that other ant making off discreetly with an immense booty in its mandibles to be laid at the feet of its superior officers.

But to see these insects at closer range you must lie face downwards on the turf until they are right under your eyes. Here is a brown, velvety spider, that with incredible speed is touring the whole area of your review. What can be the object of this feverish haste, for he gathers nothing and never halts? And here is a little fly so brilliant that it seems to comprise all the colours of the rainbow in its tiny body, a veritable atom of multicoloured fire.

Its antennæ are finer than any hair and its legs so delicately constructed that the joints are almost invisible. It is slowly waving its feelers to catch who knows what messages from distant regions, and now and again lifts a tiny leg to rub a Lilliputian thigh, or mounts a little higher along the blade on which it rests. Alas! it has suddenly flashed away into the empyrean and is lost to view. What wonderful mechanism is this which, set in motion by its own volition, can go through all the myriad activities of this minute insect. The smallest wrist-watch is indeed a marvellous invention by man, but how shall it compare with this infinitely smaller, but glorious little fly, this particle of fiery colour, with its nerve centres and blood vessels, its brain, its sight, its feeling, and with senses probably you know not of. Within that gem-like casket is gathered the whole economy of life—nutrition, elimination of waste, generation, circulation, and heart-beat. It is a warm-blooded creature, conscious and reasoning, with the power to act or not to act, to fly or not to fly. Here you see within this puny compass the whole problem of the Universe, the entire marvel of existence, so magical in its minuteness and perfection, so complete in the adaptation of all the organs to its scheme of life, that the works of man and all his engines sink into insignificance and commonplace beside it. Here about you is a world that compels your wonder even more than does your own, for it is more varied, more multitudinous in its functions, more complex in its inter-relation and of a workmanship more exquisite than the world of men. That such infinite pains should have been

devoted to the evolution of organisms that survive but a week, or a day, or an hour, that there should be countless billions of them, like the sands of the sea, and countless varieties and species, some gorgeous in hue, others lovely in form, all perfect in the proportion of their parts, fills you with a sense of increasing awe. What mystery is this? How vast the mind that could conceive, how unerring the hand that could fashion it. It is in these realms, maybe, rather than in those of man, that one day we may read the truth. You feel like an outsider on the skirts of a busy company. You would be one of them if they would let you. They seem to be nearer the heart of things, to contain more reality, to be closer to the core of the scheme of life than you are, when in the course of your ordinary avocations you move from one artificiality to another. You feel, in fact, that you belong to them rather than to us.

Once more the scene is shifted. You are nearing the end of your enfranchisement and in a day or two must return home. Your clothes are slightly torn and your shoes badly scratched, but you can walk and climb and run with ease, almost untiringly, and your friends would hardly know you for the same person. A breeze is blowing this afternoon, and the stream that flows beside you is flicked into crinkled wavelets. Overhead are the clouds, pillowy, and scarcely moving, for the draughty currents are near the earth to-day. The stream is speaking to you. You can hear its voice quite plainly though the words are confused, for clumps of bulrushes break the perfect rhythm of the water. It is flowing

rapidly through emerald lands, almost on a level with the pastures that border it, and is hurrying, hurrying, hurrying to the sea, to lose itself in that immensity and merge its personality in that of another. Where has it come from? From a wood miles away, out of a tiny spring buried in the trees under a cleft boulder, a spring fed by the percolating moistures gathered by the clouds from vast surrounding waters, waters which shall again have returned to them what they have offered up. It is thus for a spell only that the personality of the stream prevails; a brief span of bubbling, leaping youth, then a slower, deeper and more solemn progress until it returns whither it came. A herd of cattle are waiting on the other side, gazing at a gateway, for milking-time is close at hand, each one of them of champion breed, deep red against the bright green of the herbage, with long straight back and huge distended udder. Further on, half-hidden by a group of firs, stands a village church; its aculeated spire rising amid them, and at this distance so similar in shape that it might be fed from the self-same soil. A host of swallows is hunting invisible game as with scimitar wings they cleave the airy altitudes above you. A few are busy on the surface of the water, skimming so close to it that whether by accident or design they sometimes graze it with their white breasts, scattering little showers of diamond spray about them. Here is the perfection of flight, as darting, gliding, dipping, wheeling, with inimitable grace and effortless ease, they give you this marvellous performance in the commonplace routine of their daily meal. Hark! the stream is

speaking to you again. How insistent it is. It is trying to make you understand something; for it is not inarticulate, only you that are uncomprehending. Its message has something to do with Time. Every second there is a new stream in front of you; the former one has flowed away and a new one is hastening up. It is here and yet not here. It has left or is about to arrive, and yet its personality persists and is unchanged as you stand on the brink listening to its voice. It has gone and yet it is with you; it is coming and yet it is here. That is it—the Past and the Future are wrapped in the Present. There is no such thing as Time. It is a hallucination in which your mind works. Eternity is in the present moment. This is the secret of the stream. A woodpecker has just laughed from some limes behind you, a strident, joyless laugh. Was it in mockery? You have no past and no future. Your past, present, and future are one, and they are *now*. This is the only point of reality, and you have learnt this from the speeding water. The rest is a mirage, a delusion, the medium merely in which the human intellect is constrained to act.

You have loitered so long that the daylight is beginning to fail. The cattle have departed to their stalls, and over the meadows, for it is Sunday evening, travels the sound of the church bells summoning the simple folk to prayer. The swallows have disappeared to snatch a brief respite from their endless chasing and you turn away down the little path which leads over the fields to the inn where you are staying. The breeze has died down and the sun is setting in a blaze of glory. Layer upon layer of

violet, olive, and rosy cloud stretch from the horizon to the zenith. The firmament is on fire. It is a conflagration of the heavens, as the blood-red orb of day sinks gradually in the west. Colour succeeds colour in gorgeous and ever-changing pageant as the skyey mountain ridges, piled one upon the other, are bathed in a sea of opalescent light. Heliotrope and orange, green and amber, and passionate crimson flame, wax and wane and interweave in the burning warp of this celestial tapestry. A few moments more and the colours have all faded, excepting for a faint incarnadined trail, and that, too, has now gone. This display of elemental beauty has been a farewell and you feel the pain of it. It has been the exit of the dying day, majestic, sad, irrevocable. Your holiday is over and to-morrow you will resume the almost forgotten fardel of your daily work.

The first tall chimney of your city home rises before you as the train rushes from the country into the dingy suburbs. How strange it all looks, how artificial, how out of touch with reality! The bore in your club, the starch in your shirts, the bowing waiters, the blinding advertisements, the evening Press, the noise of the streets, all are unreal. How you long to escape from it, back to the quietude of woods, streams, hills, and plains, to the untainted air, where you can hear the heart-beat of Nature, and be with her and of her. Thus think you, traveller, and here we leave you. It has been a voyage of the imagination, but wherever you may be, if fancy wills it, you can once again in secret tread the vales and meads of beauty and listen to the music of the woods and fields.

XVI

FIRST EDITIONS

As there are two methods of dealing with money, so are there two kinds of libraries, the one for use, and the other to hoard. How well we all know the calm delight of readable books wherever we may find them, under our own roof or that of another. What need have some of us of other companionship when we can sit with these comrades about us, on a winter's evening, with the firelight flickering on their familiar shapes? We know their thoughts better than we can ever divine those of our intimates. Their little foibles and virtues, their prejudices and affections we have traced a hundred times. And yet they are ever new. Although we tread the self-same path, we come upon unexpected vistas and wild, delicious spots that we had overlooked in our earlier rambles. For every disease of temper, for every mood, for every season, here are the remedies and associates at our call, never forcing their attentions, but always ready to welcome, sustain, cure, amuse, or instruct us. This is the kind of library that a man may make his own. As he sits there amid these silent and beloved companions, the dramatists, the historians, the poets, the philosophers, the men of science, the novelists, the essayists, he may truly claim that he is of their circle. For he has inbreathed

their spirit, and some of their humanity has become incorporated with his own. They have tempered his griefs, corrected his passions, enlarged his sympathies, awakened his interest and wonder as a citizen of the world, and done their best, however fitfully he may have sought them, to make him a happier and a wiser man. Though gratitude is one of the rarer virtues, a man generally feels grateful to his books.

But there is another and lesser sort of library, with an esoteric charm of its own, and gathered together with quite a different purpose. This is the library of the *virtuoso*, the sanctuary of first editions. It is collected to look at, not to be read; to be sheltered from dust, worms, damp, and usage; to be housed like an exotic in an even temperature, and locked away from the manipulations of the ordinary inquirer. Whereas most of us can appreciate the delights of the first, it is not everyone who has the means and opportunity, or even the temperament, to enjoy the delicate pleasure that the handling of a rare volume can afford. For this enjoyment lies not in its beauty, as in that of an illuminated missal or splendid binding, for its pages may be destitute of colour or illustration, and it may be clothed in humble sheepskin. It may boast of no noble letterpress, as in our Caxtons or Pynsons, nor of margined vellum or finely wrought paper, as in many sumptuous modern issues in this and other lands, for its type may be clumsy and its paper coarse or worn and friable. In short, it may be as sad and seedy-looking a tome as any to be found in an odd lot down a side street of one of our provincial towns,

with its headlines mutilated, its colophon and fly-leaves missing, its title defaced, its pages stained and worm-eaten, its black-letter contents almost unreadable, and yet be one of the most highly prized treasures in the whole collection.

What, then, is the peculiar magic of such a shelf-ful? It is the fascination of a hobby, the lure of rarity and therefore of value, the charm of possessing what others have striven for and been unable to get, combined with the pleasure of shepherding together, and so, temporarily, of giving a new kind of form to things which, in their union, express what you believe to be your own special individuality and taste and humour. There is, besides, the additional and finer charm, which can be intellectualized indefinitely, of association with the spirit of the times that produced these books and the genius or character of the men who wrote them. The charm, that is, of drawing closer to the vanished past, of recovering something of its receding outline, of almost touching the fingers and looking into the faces of those actors of a bygone day—just as you may stand within an ancient ruin and try to reconstruct its mouldering galleries, peopling its rooflessness with gaiety and fashion, peace and war, love and beauty, while the moon is silvering the ivy that is climbing in its chambers, and its floors are strewn with the memories of the dead.

Who but a dunce will not feel a thrill of reverence, as he holds in his hands the first issue of the Madrid *Don Quixote*, or of *King Lear*, or Pascal's *Pensées*? For are they not works that belong to all peoples, that have made humanity laugh and weep and pray

for more than three centuries? These are the very volumes, seen and touched perhaps by their authors, the identical leaves that first conveyed their message to the great world. This was the earliest news of them, that sped on wings of light, until every nation had adopted them for its own. Row upon row they stand, these glories of the human intellect—Montaigne, Molière, Milton, Chaucer. Wipe all these names from the world's records, and how much poorer we should be! And the books before us are relics of these old heroes, saved from the maw of all-devouring Time, and that is why we cherish and enshrine them, unashamed at the enthusiasm and emotions they evoke. He cannot wholly be a mean fellow who collects in such a spirit. It betokens imagination and veneration for great achievement, and a dramatic instinct for the landmarks in human art and thought.

But, as in any other occupation, there may be a declension from these first principles, which give dignity to it, through an ever-diminishing scale to the trifling and the futile. And this is a curse on human nature, and particularly the bane of those who, like professional critics, do not, as a rule themselves construct, but only collect and review. They descend to trivialities and end by regarding the latter as equally important with all the rest. The declination is all the more insidious because it is gradual. There is no sudden plunge (we are speaking all the while of first editions) from *Paradise Lost* to Woodhouse's *Flea*.¹ But there are facile stages

¹ *The Contention between the Elephant and the Flea*, 1605, by Peter Woodhouse.

through the *Lusiad*, the *Cid* and the *Faerie Queen*, through Marlowe, Ronsard, Bossuet, and Dryden, through Ford and Dekker, Churchyard and Nash, to Peter Colse¹ and Bernard Garter,² Patrick Gordon³ and Samuel Pordage,⁴ *Emaricdulfe*⁵ and *Antibossicon*,⁶ to the final absurdity and vacuity of the *Flea*, over which last nonentity many a covetous hour has been squandered and many a valuable pound spent.

It is these insignificances, too, that are apt to be dressed in the finest liveries, as can easily be seen at public auctions. Plain calf will serve for the *Compleat Angler* or *Gil Blas*, and untooled morocco for the sonnets to *W. H.*; but for Francis Sabie,⁷ John God,⁸ or Barnabe Barnes,⁹ the bindings cannot be too costly. The lower the rank the more must the outside be gilded and refined, just as a lackey is sometimes tricked out more expensively than the master himself. All the hierarchy of craftsmen are called in to embalm the refuse. Zaehnsdorff clothes a *chef-d'œuvre* by Samuel Brasse,¹⁰ Rivière one by Richard Linch¹¹ or John Splynter,¹² Thibaron-Joly or Capé a third, and Lortic, Charles Lewis, or Cobden Sanderson a fourth. There is a perfect riot of red, blue, olive, and yellow morocco. Panelled sides, scroll borders, inside dentelles, silk gilt linings—nothing can be too choice for the *Gluttons Fever*,¹³

¹ *Penelope's Complaint*, 1596.

² *Two English Lovers*, 1565.

³ *Penardo and Laissa*, 1615.

⁴ *Poems*, 1660.

⁵ *Sonnets*, 1595.

⁶ *W. Horman*, 1521.

⁷ *Pan's Pipe—Pastoral Eclogues*, 1595.

⁸ *Cruelty of a Widow towards a Young Gentleman* (in verse).

⁹ *A Divine Century of Spiritual Sonnets*.

¹⁰ *A Ship of Armes* (in verse), 1653.

¹¹ *Diella—Certain Sonnets*, 1596.

¹² *How J. S. Made his Testament* (in verse).


¹³ Thomas Bancroft (a poem), 1633.

Dobson's Drie Bobbes,¹ *Fair Em*,² or *The Mouse Trap*.³ And what misery it is when Huth or Daniel can boast of a millimetre more in the height of a page: what transports of triumphant joy when the Britwell copy is found to be a millimetre less! And so it proceeds with more and more refining and ever more luxury of material and design, until you can pick out the masterpieces by their drab and lowly habit, and the vast proportion of the remainder is the accumulated rubbish of a past age.

But what a spot for quiet retirement and self-communion is a library of early masterpieces, garnered with care and wise discretion through years of vigilance and at frequent sacrifice. In this tall folio was a holiday forgone, in this octavo another, in that slender quarto many a small charge saved. What precious relics they are! Bacon may have skimmed the first ten essays, turning these identical pages. Defoe and Bunyan, Swift and Sterne, Rabelais and La Fontaine, did they at last know themselves for immortal when they saw perhaps these other leaves for the first time? Was poor Blake consoled by *these* few sheets, or Lamb, or Keats, or others like them, who, diseased in mind or body, have felt the scorching of the divine fire? Tragedy and farce, honour and dishonour, success and failure, hope and despair, jostle and press upon each other in this little room. The very breath of the past is in the breath of these books. They, too, like their architects, will drop into dust some day—many of them are visibly crumbling now. But there is an emanation in the atmosphere of something preter-

¹ 1607.² 1631.³ Henry Parrot, 1606.

natural. It is rising from the shelves and wrapping us about. All the eloquence and wisdom, all the passion and genius of these great men are like a living current, undying, inexhaustible, flooding our senses as we gaze on these volumes, useless rarities in themselves, but, so long as they hold together, inviolably sacred, coming to us as they do from the very hands of those that made them.



XVII

THE COUNTRY DOCTOR

AMONG the various personalities that crowd the memories of my early youth a certain physician, long since deceased, stands out in particularly salient relief. He was our old family medico, with a large country practice and a house about four miles from where we lived. I can see him now, a short, stoutish figure, clean-shaven, and with a bald, shining cranium, small, kindly, but wily optics, a smooth manner, and a smile of unquenchable benevolence. No other doctor I have known, and I have met not a few, could begin to rival the irresistible caress of his bedside manner. It was consummate, for it was entirely natural to the man. He radiated sympathy and understanding. The vast experience he had accumulated over a professional career of fifty years—he died in harness when well over seventy—enabled him not only to gauge the gravity of any particular complaint, but the character and temperament of the sufferer, and to attune his manner to the exigencies of the ‘case.’ He was not only our family doctor; he was a loved friend. Fortunately, we never had occasion to make the experiment, but doubtless had any such emergency arisen, and we had turned to him in trouble for worldly or even spiritual advice, the same bedside manner, the same

milk of human kindness, the same charitable wisdom, would have been at our disposal, and we should have felt, like his patients, in the hands of one of God's good men, and on the sure high-road to convalescence.

But with all this conspicuous benevolence, there was a streak at times of cold mercilessness about him. I shall never forget twisting a knee at a football match when about sixteen years of age, and having to be brought home in a carriage. Dr. A. was sent for and arrived beaming. 'Now, my dear boy, what mischief have you been up to? Ah, yes, there's a little water there. Can you bend it?'—and the dear old fellow took my leg tenderly below the knee in his two soft hands, speaking soothingly to me the while, and then, suddenly, without a word of warning, gave the joint a cruel and tremendous torsion, sending such a spasm of agony through my being as brought the tears rolling down my cheeks and a feeling of horrible nausea into the pit of my stomach. In these more enlightened days, matters would have been handled in a gentler fashion, but Dr. A. wanted to find out whether there had been any displacement and to put it right, if there were, and the method chosen was, I daresay, the easiest and quickest way to do it. It was a long time before I quite forgave him, and for years afterwards, when he adopted a particularly soothing form of address, my suspicions were at once aroused, and I watched him warily, and could almost feel anew the terrible stab of pain that he had once inflicted.

How callous he must have grown in the perpetual presence of death!—and yet, perhaps, not so callous. There may have been, I believe there was, a

perennial fount of human love in this sagacious old man that kept his heart ever green and his feelings sensitive to the sufferings of others. How many dyings in all kinds of circumstances must he have witnessed in the large area of his practice in fifty years, of people of all degrees, of the old, middle-aged, and young; from sudden accident, torturing disease, vice, hereditary complaint, old age—deaths of those taken unawares, of mad folk, of strong, stubborn natures, hardily fighting to the end, of penitents, of unreclaimed evil-doers, of those who had calmly waited and prepared themselves for death. How many bedsides must he have sat at, expectant, watchful. Every symptom must have grown familiar. The last feeble utterances, the final gaze, the ultimate sigh, the movement of the hands, the flicker of the eyelids, the changing colour—he had heard and seen them times out of number, until he knew them all by heart, for in the long history of his ministrations they had been repeated over and over again.

When I had passed from boyhood to early manhood, and was an undergraduate at the University, I recollect being laid up at home with some minor ailment, and having a long chat with Dr. A. He was by this time a very old man, nearing the end of his days, and had made it a habit only to attend those families whom he had visited for many years. Like most young men, I had an insatiable thirst for knowledge, an unquenchable curiosity, directed in my own case to the mysteries of life and death, and to some of the recent theories about them that had created quite a stir in scientific circles. What con-

stituted the vital spark? What happened at the moment of dissolution? Was there an actual subtraction from the weight of the human body at the instant of death, of so infinitesimal an amount, however, that it had never yet been capable of measurement? Had the expressions in the faces of the dying ever been fixed by the camera? These and kindred conundrums had often occupied my mind. Now, here was I, lying temporarily bedridden, but otherwise in full vigour of young manhood, with this old physician seated beside me, full of years and ripe experience. It was a chance not to be missed, and so I slid, as it were casually, into the subject which had lately so exercised my thoughts. Who could possibly have been better equipped than this wise old counsellor? I wanted for my purpose someone observant, who over a long period of time had watched many hundreds of persons quietly die. Dr. A. was inclined at first to put me off. After all, was I not his patient? So morbid a discussion could do me no good, and was not to be encouraged in one so young. But his hesitation only made me the more eager, and when he saw my persistence agreed to indulge my whim. And this is the gist of what he told me on that summer afternoon, while the call of the cuckoo came through the open window and the murmur of the bees could be heard in the twining honeysuckle that climbed the wall below. I can picture him as he sat there, with a white cravat and stiff collar, a little humped about the shoulders, speaking thoughtfully, with serious eyes, as he conjured up these last scenes in life's drama.

He had nothing to relate about the deaths of

young people or those who had died in a state of unconsciousness. But now that I had questioned him, for no one had ever raised the matter with him before, he did happen to have noticed a rather curious feature in some of the older patients at the moment of their passing. The peculiarity he was alluding to was never noticeable in those under forty, nor in cases where the sufferer had died under distressing circumstances, and the end had been painful or disturbed. Nor had he observed it in what he might call philosophical or learned people. Where it had been present was occasionally in the case of older patients who had had a peaceful end and been conscious to the last, particularly those who had lived, so to speak, a practical life, and, even in their last moments, had displayed a keen interest in things about them. What was it? I excitedly asked, for I felt as though I were about to be let into a momentous secret, and was half afraid he might beat about the bush and evade my curiosity after all.

‘A look of surprise sometimes comes into their eyes at the instant of death,’ he replied. He had seen this happen a good many times during his half-century of work. I plied him with queries, trying to extract additional details, but he had nothing further to impart, and no solution of the mystery to offer. It was just a fact of experience, unplumbable so far as he was concerned. Indeed, he had never tried to explain it to himself, and, until I had asked him about it, had never given it any consideration, although at times, it is true, he had wondered a little, and then wholly forgotten.

This talk I have always remembered, but no opportunity ever offered for further questioning, as within a month our old friend had passed away and been replaced by a doctor many years his junior. Could it be that death is the awakening from a dream? That all the hard reality of life turns out to be a mirage? Is this the surprise? We know what it is to wake from a vivid dream. For an appreciable moment we are doubtful whether it is reality or no. Then we realize it is only a phantom of the brain, and yet have not the power to release ourselves completely from its entanglements. Gradually we exert our wills to get back to actuality, but it sometimes needs a powerful effort to shake off dreamland, and convince ourselves that it was merely a mental illusion. A friend once told me that, years before, he had been bicycling one morning in the country and that, on getting back home, certain symptoms having made their appearance, he hurried up to town to consult a specialist. He had believed himself to be in perfect health, but the surgeon, after examination, told him he must undergo an operation without delay, a grave one, which, although the surgeon did not say so, would, he knew, cripple him for months, if not for years, and probably alter the whole course of his career. My friend was to go into a nursing home the following day. That evening he returned to his flat, not so much scared as numbed. He slept soundly and woke at the usual time, glancing round at the familiar walls, when suddenly he remembered the terrible events of the day before, and the full import of what had happened came home to him.

Then a curious conviction laid hold upon him. It was all a dream, a hideous nightmare. It seemed indeed horribly real, for was he not lying there in his room, and had he not had that harrowing interview with the surgeon only a few hours previously? But what, after all, could seem more real than a vivid dream just as one was emerging from it? An effort of will and it was always soon dispersed; the phantasmagoria melted away and one's ordinary world reappeared piece by piece. He knew this last calamity to be likewise but a figment of the brain, imaginal, yet an illusion that might harden into fact unless it were instantly broken up. For the moment it was unreal. Had he the will power to dissolve it? Over and over again he tried to get back to the world of reality. Once or twice he nearly succeeded. The pattern of twenty-four hours ago was slowly reappearing, the horror was dislimning, the dream disintegrating. One more determined effort and he could have accomplished it, one supreme act of faith, and the cloud of fantasy would have rolled away. He knew this for certain; was convinced that it was only a loathsome hallucination. There were two worlds side by side, and interchangeable, if only one had the will and the faith. But these failed him at the very moment of achievement, and he was reabsorbed into the nightmare and could not awake.

There is a passage bearing upon the same problem in one of George Borrow's books. In it he describes a conversation with an Andalusian drover. The peasant relates how he would be on a hill-side in charge of horses that were grazing and moving

about in front of him; how with an effort of will he could empty the scene of all of them, until he stood alone looking upon the deserted pasture; and then how he would allow the animals gradually to reappear until the whole drove was there once more. He had an idea that the truth of the matter was the horses were not there at all, and added that he was not alone in this peculiar power, but knew of others who possessed it too. In fact, to that small extent, this Spanish herd was able to fashion his own world, and was doing consciously what, we are told by some of the metaphysicians, every man unwittingly does whenever he observes phenomena.

Would that we were able to interpret this sudden look of surprise on some of the faces of the dying! What secret do they discover? What revelation is made to them? The old doctor had never seen it in the eyes of the young. Is it that youth already regards life as a kind of fairyland; that material fact is often of less significance than in the case of the old; that the young live largely in dreamland, still trailing their clouds of glory, and that therefore death, a transition for them from comparative unreality, is less of a shock than it is to others? For the thoughtful and the learned too, for those who have passed a portion of their days in contemplation, pondering the mysteries of life, for them also the crossing of the borderland may not be so strange. But the others, those who have taken uninquiringly things as they came, who have long left their fairyland behind them—when these pass the border, if perchance they awake to find their

long-endured reality is naught but a dream, they are taken unawares and surprise may well be their last emotion as they step across the boundary between this world and that.

Several years after the death of our old friend, his daughter came to call and found me alone. She and her mother and sister were in straitened circumstances, but had managed to keep their house and were still living in it. We naturally fell to talking of the past, of her father, and I asked her about the last few weeks of his life. It appeared that I had been almost his final 'case.' He had returned home the following day, feeling out of sorts, had taken to his bed, and never again left it. It was the most peaceful ending she could have imagined or wished for. He was conscious throughout, suggesting the arrangements for the funeral, winding up his affairs, giving little mementoes to members of the household, paying all his bills. An hour before he died he told his family how happy he had been, and gave his wife into the care of his daughters, hoping that they would try to go on living in the old house. He asked after several neighbours, including ourselves. Then with a beautiful smile he said good-bye to those gathered about his bedside, and closed his eyes. A minute or so later he opened them wide once more, a look of surprise seemed to flit over his features, and when they bent over him he had passed away.

My last conversation with him suddenly came back to me. Had he too been surprised? The daily round of patients, the Cottage Hospital, the Church

services, the gossip, the night-calls, the dinners with the Squire, the long journeys with the pony and trap, the bad debts, his wife and children, did he wake to find them after all a mirage? Who can tell? Peace be to his soul!

XVIII

GHOSTS

I WILL not assert that I do not believe in ghosts, not at least in public, for fear of possible reprisals from the spectral hosts. For of the unseen world of spirits around and about me I am ever conscious, invisible though they be to human optics and inaudible for human ears. But too bold a certainty, too dogmatic a disbelief, might tempt them from their undimensional spheres to appal me in disproof. In rounding a corner of the passage with a candlestick in my hand, at dead of night, I might run full tilt into one of them. Were it unassumingly accoutred in the fashion of its period, if its port were friendly, if it uttered no sound and took no notice, a cold sweat would doubtless start upon my brow, but I would pursue my way to bed, I hope, with steadfastness and decorum. But were it to parade the horrors of the vault, the sightless sockets of long burial, a chapless, grinning mazard; if it were to howl and bar the way, then indeed might reason tremble in the balance. Therefore I will not risk any rash and presumptuous denial, but aver here and now, in black and in white, that the age-long problem is so unfathomable a mystery that none can say. We may all of us be but manifestations of an indivisible Spirit, clothed for a space in the varying integu-

ments of mortality, and, when these disintegrate and disappear, each spiritual content may be reabsorbed into the enduring unity of the whole. Or we may not only have individual bodies but individual souls, each with a personality distinct and particular. How much more seemingly difficult, in the first case, for the re-emergence of the spirit under such conditions as we knew it, when the tiny droplet has fallen back into the immensity of the ocean and lost any individuality that it once had. But in the other we can conceive a spirit with a personality of its own haunting the scenes where it had lived in the flesh, yearning to make itself known to the companions of those brief but ever-memorable days, and in certain rare concomitancies, unexplainable as yet, getting once more into touch with the organs of sense.

In this connection I shall not easily forget what at the time I verily believed to be a momentary lifting of the veil. It was more than twenty years ago, twenty years during which judgment has ripened and scepticism increased, twenty years of sobered faith and mocked illusion. So many seeming realities have turned out to be phantoms, that what I then held to be supernatural may well have been naught but a hallucination like the rest, an empty eidolon of the brain.

It was in the spring of 1905, in our old home in the Midlands, that the incident had its origin. A friend was staying with us who for some time had been interested in psychic phenomena and made it a practice, whenever he heard of the advent of a new medium or the formation of a spiritualistic circle,

to investigate, as far as he was able, the mystic proceedings on the spot. He had come on this occasion to look into the *bona fides* or otherwise of a Mr. T., a medium who had arrived in the neighbourhood a short time before and who claimed to be able to conjure up manifestations of departed persons. Mr. T. was living in a colliery village near by and was in the habit of holding his séances in a house belonging to one of the miners. A good many of the colliers and their wives believed in him, and my guest, who was a member of the Psychical Research Society, was anxious to see for himself and report to his colleagues whether there was any genuine foundation for the man's reputation or whether he was merely a charlatan and a humbug. On the evening, therefore, of my friend's arrival, I accompanied him, together with another guest, to the cottage in the village where the séance was to take place. It was a hideous red-brick tenement, standing in a row with many others precisely similar, without a garden, and abutting directly on a rubbish-littered street: in fact, a soul-benumbing habitation, typical of the district and of the period. When we arrived we were shown into a room barely redeemed from total obscurity by a pin-point of light that wavered from a solitary gas-bracket and seemed in danger at any moment of complete extinguishment. Several women and one or two men were sitting on benches in a semicircle with their backs to the wall.

At the other end of the room stood an empty chair, and nearer to us a small harmonium at which sat a corpulent man with a large flat face. The air was laden with the effluvium of sweaty human bodies

and of clothes none too clean. Presently the medium entered, a shifty, cadaverous-looking fellow of about thirty years of age, with a drooping moustache, long, matted hair, and a waxen complexion, and sat down in the vacant chair. The man at the harmonium thereupon bade us, in rich, unctuous tones, to join hands, and began to play the notes of a hymn, occasionally stopping to read some sentences out of a Bible. The heat of the room with its closed windows was oppressive to a degree, and the hand which I was holding on either side of me grew moister and moister. After a short while the medium began to writhe and moan and roll his eyes, and then became still, with his chin sunk upon his chest, having, so the harmonium-player informed us, 'gone off into a trance.' The latter now asked us whether we desired to summon anyone from the spirit world and, if so, whom we wished to see, but he warned us that unless we were in complete sympathy one with another and the celestial current was flowing freely nothing would happen.

Upon this the neighbour on each side of me gave my hand a tremendous squeeze. A woman then said that she would like to look upon her sister. Little by little a nebulous figure with hair down its back began to take shape on the other side of the room against the wall. It was so dark that we could hardly make out the medium or indeed anyone else, for the light was almost extinct. Hardly had the apparition assumed its ill-defined form than it proceeded to dematerialize, not as a whole, but from the feet upwards as though a flood of ink were gradually rising in the room and blotting it out.

My guest, not the one who had come to investigate, but the other, a shameless unbeliever and graceless wag, then inquired whether he might gaze upon his grandparent, a man of almost titanic proportions who during life had worn a patriarchal beard. There was a longer interval than usual and then once more an indistinct figure emerged, not the majestic empuse that we had looked for, but a phantom of the same stature as the last, and, so far as could be discerned, clean-shaven. Whereupon my friend observed, loudly enough for all to hear, and to the evident annoyance of the harmonium-player—‘How you’ve shrunk, Grandpa!’

A woman then inquired whether on the next occasion she might feel the garment in which the spirit was clad. Permission being given, the next wraith, that of a female, advanced a trifle closer, and an end of the filmy shroud which enveloped it was held out for the believer to touch. The deluded creature fingered it and in an ecstasy of wonder said: ‘It melts in my ’and,’ upon which another woman, with more gumption, retorted: ‘What else can you expect, dearie, seeing it’s made of ’evingly stuff?’ The woman on my left, whose palm I was still gripping, now requested that she might see her little girl who, so she told me, had died six months before. The harmonium-player replied that he was sorry, but that adults only were permitted to leave the spirit world and to appear for a moment or two. The medium upon this emitted a deep groan, and for the first time sat upright in his chair, lifting his head and staring towards us with unseeing eyes. The player announced that Mr. T. was waking


from his trance, and that before the séance concluded they would sing a hymn. Whereupon he began to strike a few notes, chiefly with one hand, and those who were present softly joined in the singing, taking the time from him as he beat it with the other. But I happened to be watching the medium, who now verily looked as though he were in a kind of catalepsy. Suddenly there appeared at the other end of the room the faintest pool of light, and the figure of a child seemed to issue from it for a moment, to stretch out its little arms and fade away. A spasm ran through the woman sitting beside me as I held her hand, and I could see that she was gazing in the same direction. 'It's her,' she whispered, 'my little Effie,' and she began to weep.

The meeting after this broke up. The medium was awake and sleepily bade us good night. There was supper in another room, of which all were expected to partake and for which payment was exacted, for admission to the séance was free, and it was only by this charge for the subsequent repast, an exorbitant one, that the medium and his manager were able to make their profits and at the same time keep within the law. When we got home my friends and I proceeded to discuss what we had seen, the member of the Psychical Society straightway pronouncing the medium to be a fraud and the whole séance a hum, explaining the method by which it was done. Indeed, none of us had been really taken in. The apparatus of deception had been crude and clumsy, the materializations and dematerializations being effected by means of a third accomplice and a black sheet. I made, however, one reservation

—the child that had taken shape. ‘What child?’ they asked. I replied that I referred to the last materialization while the final hymn was being sung. They both declared that there had been no such appearance, and indeed it had been obvious to me at the time that no one besides myself and my neighbour had noticed it, for everyone was watching the player beating time with his arm. Had I been deceived by some trick of light or by the intense conviction of the woman whose hand was in mine? Or had the medium at last become a medium in truth and had some psychic stimulus suddenly united the three of us and produced in the brains of two the image the mother wanted to see? Who can tell? I did not press the matter, but was not so confident in my own mind that everything that night had been part of the hoax. Three weeks later Mr. T. was mercilessly pilloried by my friend in the Society’s journal, a ludicrous account being given of the séance. Thenceforward he was never heard of again, but I ask myself at times what he thinks about it all, and whether he would tell you in strictest confidence that on occasions at these séances he would completely lose control of himself, becoming insensible to all about him and waking up wondering where he had been.

I remember once talking to an ancient countryman. He was standing in the garden of his cottage, and the evening sun lit up the thatched roof and timbered walls, covered with climbing roses, with its golden beams. It was a scene of ineffable peace. The old fellow was a widower, his wife having died a few years previously. He told me that of an evening,

when he sat smoking by the chimney-corner, she would sometimes come in and sit opposite him on the other side, doing her knitting, as had always been her habit during life. He never spoke to her nor she to him, but he liked to see her there when he was lonely, and to feel her presence. He would miss her if she did not come, but he doubted not she would keep him company to the end. I was always fond of this story, for what could be happier? Having lost dear ones, yet not to lose them. To have them occasionally with us as of old, to bridge the abyss between life and death, to soften the agony of the last farewells. But an instinct tells me that personal obliteration may be the lot of mortal man; that when the soul has quit the body it may be absorbed, and the individuality we have been conscious of, with its memories and expectations, become merged in something impersonal and bigger; that this life may be as unreal as a dream, a gross and temporal delusion, the splintered fragments of the truth into which the universal spirit is for the moment sundered, and that the awakening will find us—what? We cannot tell.



XIX

SPIRITS OF THE AIR

IT would be a dull world without the spirits of the air. Is anything more desolate than a wood where they do not make their home? There may be beechen groves, where every tree is a separate glory, and the company of them together a feast for hungry eyes; or towering pines sleeping against the blue background of a summer's day; or carpets of flowers that sweep like embroidered trains about the feet of the forest and give no echo to your footfall; but without the voice of the birds they are like a setting without its jewel or a body without a soul. Wherein lies the charm of these little choristers? Is it not that they are links between earth and heaven, the seen and the unseen, the material and the immaterial? Of all living organisms they appear to be the least mechanical. Conscious, as we are, of ruthless law, their seeming liberty brings before us visions of what once we may have been before our earthly imprisonment, and what we might come to were this 'muddy vesture of decay' to slip from us. That such tiny threads of song should stir us so deeply, coursing like a current between ourselves and the invisible, is wonderful indeed. Who has stood beneath a shower of melody from one of these delicious singers and not felt lifted into a fairy world?

Somewhere in French Flanders there is a sleepy, lawn-like park with a river flowing in the midst of it, and birds innumerable warbling and twittering in the sedges that line the water's brim, and in the wild, untrodden spinneys that skirt the boundaries of that green domain. In the spring and summer of 1916 a pair of golden orioles had their nesting-place on the margin of this stream. Their loud, melodious cry and yellow plumage gave an almost tropical atmosphere to the sanctuary which they had chosen, hedged about with a maze of leaf and bough. It was one of the indulgences of that time to snatch a moment in the early morning and catch these lovely visitors unaware. Later in the day men-of-arms were everywhere, and the birds were hidden from view. But in the still peace of dawn, when the dew lay heavy on herb and flower and the sun had but just started on his pilgrimage, they seemed to doff their shyness and distrust of man, swinging in and out of their bower in full view, and greeting the new-born day with eager, welcoming call. They were travellers from a far country, and we were their honoured hosts. They were with us, but not of us—exotic, strange, speaking in an unknown tongue with clarions of silver, apparelled in raiment that set the very leaves on fire. Not soon shall we forget you, prophets of coming peace, who carried on your wings the glow of the saffron East and in your tumultuous vibrant hearts the song of hope and victory!

But longer to be remembered because more poignant, was the wailing of the nightingales at that extraordinary time. Never before, so it was

said, had their company been so large. Within this same small area there must have been a dozen pairs, and their long-drawn plaint filled the warm evenings and the starry nights. When there was sufficient light, the ambition of the wakeful was to steal close enough to see the master-melodist actually in the midst of his song, and to watch the swelling throat and drooping wings as the liquid notes gushed forth upon the tranquil air. But this was hardly ever possible. Beyond a well-recognized distance the wizard would never let you pass. The fluting would suddenly cease and the tree or thicket lose its magic in an instant, becoming once more merely an ordinary object to the sense. Occasionally, it is true, you might be only a couple of yards away, and still the anthem would continue, but in that case the bird was so hidden from view that he knew you could not spy upon him, even if he could keep his eye on you. At such times, the spot where you were standing itself seemed to be surging with song, every blade of grass, every twig, the pale upturned faces of the flowers, the very ground and ambient air themselves. It was as though organic and inorganic, the visible and invisible, had cast aside the fetters of individual form and matter and merged for a brief spell in some common grief beyond time and the grave. The melody then seemed to be incorporate in everything, and, little by little, one imagined oneself also to be singing, uttering the lament of a subliminal self, part of the divine orchestra that throbbed and filled the world.

Lying awake at night with open window, removed from their immediate presence, one could count the

different performers in this scattered choir. They replied to one another from their separate stations, sorrow for sorrow, plaint for plaint. What was their pain, this unforgettable, incurable ache of the soul? Would it never vanish from their memory or be washed away in the tears of time? And what was that other sound, threatening and almost continuous, rumbling like distant thunder, antiphonal to theirs, answering them out of the night? It was the horror of Earth, actual, present, articulate, alternating with the unquenchable agony of remote remembrance. Never before in history had this strophe and antistrophe thus been heard, this muffled rage of the cruel engines of gigantic force, tearing and bruising, carrying suffering and desolation through the ranks of all humanity, and these yearning, passionate strains of the inconsolable spirit.

These are Princes of avian blood, whether for glory of vesture or splendour of song. But they have humbler kindred, who, in days of peace, lure the city dweller into the sloping fields and quiet coverts, where he may feel a thousand miles away from the maelstrom of business and the clashing war of wits. Who can imagine a large green woodpecker outside the Mansion House, a jay in Fleet Street, or a barn-owl at Charing Cross? Of all feathered things that breed in our isles, these seem to partake of the wildness of untamed Nature almost more than any others that are likely to be met with in a random country walk.

No one who has once seen or heard the yaffle, as the green woodpecker is called, is ever likely to

forget him. Another name for him is the gully-bird, partial, as he is, to wild, wooded valleys with bickering, scampering streams. His voice is in so complete a discord with his brilliant dress that it is quite a shock, catching sight of him on the wing, to hear his grotesque, mocking laugh as he flies from you. The time to observe him, if you can, is when he is clinging to a tree-stem, hammering it with his sharp pick to find a weak spot with insects in it for himself and his brood. It is in this position that his vivid colouring, with the bark for its background, is best seen. The glowing crimson head and blood-red cheek, the sea-green back and brown dappled wings look like jewels from a fairy carnival hung there by revellers who danced beneath the boughs. With what persistence he drives that relentless javelin into the nerves and tissue of the tree, shooting out the long, fibrous tongue to lick the prey from every crevice and cranny in the trunk! You can hear his tapping hundreds of yards away, like the sound of a mallet knocking in a wedge. If he is alarmed, he twists his ruby head round and stares at you with a beady, white-rimmed eye, and then off he goes with a swift, gliding motion and that boisterous, derisive call. He is keeper of the woodland glade, with contempt for man and all outsiders. He wears the badge of his office like the forester of a royal demesne, caring for none, consorting with none, intractable and scoffing, subject only to the invisible wood-god whose wary servant he is.

But if there be so great a contrast between the looks of the yaffle and the quality of his note, what can be said of the jay? The difference here is even

more remarkable. He is the most gaily attired of any British species. From the tip of his beak to the end of the spreading tail he is a continuous combination of bright and variegated colour. His white crest, streaked with jet, standing erect upon his poll, together with his strong, blunt nose, give him a pugnacious and impudent appearance. His chaps are black and his head a reddish brown, and a pair of vigilant dark pupils, rimmed with pale blue, are ever on the watch. His back is puce, and his tail fan-shaped and ebony, except for the terminal feathers, which are fringed with white. As a finish to this tail, the upper part of it is overlaid with a little white, downy coverlet, and another layer of tawny feathers spread beneath it. But the glory of the bird is in the base of his wing, which is of a brilliant forget-me-not slashed with black. To watch him masquerading with his comrades in the sun, fluttering from branch to branch and tree to tree, backwards and forwards, and up and down, apparently without purpose, you would think that he had no family concerns to worry about, nor anything to do but exhibit his gorgeous trappings to the plainer denizens of the wood. There is nothing more delightful on a warm and sunny day than to watch this pantomime in progress, and here and there and everywhere to follow the blue that he scatters with his wings--fragments of loveliness that counterfeit the sky.

Indeed, if this were all, would not the jay be king of the coppice for charm of manner and brilliant hue? It is when he speaks that his plebeian origin betrays him. What spiteful godmother gave him at his birth that harsh, aggressive, uncompanionable

utterance? It grates upon the ear like a file. There is something Falstaffian in the yaffle's ugly cry, but that of the jay is raucous and wholly unsocial, and gives the tympanum a jar. Alas, to how few is it vouchsafed to be eloquent as well as lovely! Too many gifts make the Olympians jealous of mortal flesh. Thus is it with the poor jay with his splendid plumes and horrible voice.

The last of the three, and even more interesting than the others, is the barn or church-owl. Of all owls he is the most owlsh. What a dapper, old-fashioned little gentleman he is, perched for a moment in the daylight upon a dead bough! No one is neater or more self-contained. Under that trim, composed exterior who would imagine that there lurked the creeping horror of things nocturnal? He looks so staid sitting there, keeping watch upon the conventions and observing all and sundry. He has reason to be proud of his livery. His face is a disc, shaped somewhat like a heart, the two valves of which are divided by a predatory beak; the whole, bill included, being coated with small, silky, dusky-white feathers, with a fringe of delicate brown running all the way round. His breast is white, his eyes are as dark as soot, and his head, back, and pliant wings are clothed with soft, flame-coloured feathers, shading off gradually from orange-buff into amber and light fawn. The legs are sheathed in white, hair-like plumes, putting a cavalier finish to this quaint equipment. In fact, a more dignified, well-groomed little figure can scarce be imagined.


But when the sun has dropped behind the tree-tops he becomes another creature. The very spirit

of the ghostly seems to invest that small, decorous frame. He is like a bird possessed. As the moon rides above the wood, casting long shadows upon fern and grass, forth he flits with soundless flight, almost like a shadow himself, sweeping close to the ground, or beating up and down across the meadows and along the covert side. And from time to time the night is rent by the dreadful scream that he utters, wrung, as it were, from the innermost chambers of agony and fear. What can be in his owl's mind when he shrieks so terribly? You feel as though touched by the breath of the gibbet. Is it terror of something unseen that is pursuing him; or torment of spirit—some ancient remorse that gives him no peace; or is it fury that seizes him now and again that he cannot hunt like others in the splendour of the sun? But even weirder than this unearthly cry is the snoring sound that he sometimes makes, almost like stifled sobbing, the most human, pitiful note of any feathered thing.

What, ominous bird, is your history out of the ages? What are your meditations as you glide like a wraith amid the moonbeams when all the world is asleep? Is it only mice that you are after, when with this goblin screech you wander through the darkening air so spectrally? Are you perhaps an outcast from the rest of your kind, purging the errors of a time long past? If so, what bitterness must be yours; huddled in some darkest corner, to hear the music of others, to listen to their gladness, to know that they are flocking and wheeling in the sun! How long will the penance last? The moon has already begun to blanch your wings. A few more

cycles and they will have become as white as snow. Will you then return to the noontide glare for the sun to sparkle upon your faded plumage, in pity for your misfortune turning it to silver? Though day would regain one of the brightest of the flying host, night would lose a brother who seems a very part and aspect of herself; who lends her much of her grim horror, and without whom the midnight hour would seem in comparison tame and undreaded.

These are some of the spirits of the air, necromancers in the form of birds, who, when they cannot beguile us with their voices or dazzle us with rainbow hues, fascinate us by their mystery and indecipherable arts. These are they who draw us from the towns into the lanes and pastures, from the company of men to the gorse-strewn commons where the whin smells like honey and every little bush tinkles like a bell; from the strident noise of traffic, the grinding of machinery, the clamour of discordant sounds into the mossy amphitheatres of the forest, where brooks gurgle in the bracken and the human voice is still. Come what may, here at least we feel ourselves to be a part of Nature. It is here that the mind can be at rest.



XX

ON BIKING

WHAT can be less romantic, I hear you remark, than to be perched on a couple of wheels like a chimpanzee on a grid, working both legs up and down, as though you were on a treadmill? Put in that way, sir, there are few people who would not agree with you. Yet there is, believe me, more to it than that. Progression in this, according to you, ridiculous posture has been one of the chief pleasures of my life, or rather, of my early life, for, with the passing of the years, one is apt to grow a little less romantic, a bit less susceptible to the dream-like beauty of the external world.

It was a humble push-bike that I used to ride, not one of those later menacing devils that devour distances and roar past like Furies from Hell, but a light, unobtrusive conveyance that could be lifted over gates, wheeled through wood and field, and repaired, if need be, after a little patient diagnosis, by the side of the road. What disparate experiences were to be had for the picking up, what quietude of spirit here, what clamorous, congested scenes there, as in leisurely mood many thousands of miles were covered in the parishes of Old England, in her towns and valleys, amid her hills and plains, through bosky coombs and shy, retiring hamlets, by coal-pits and

blast-furnaces, in remote by-ways and crowded thoroughfares, in solitary places and where the human maelstrom never rests! In what weathers, too!—downpour and snow, hurricane and airless noons, frost and sweltering heat, fleecy mist and black fog—riding at times as though the Fiend were at your heels, at others at a snail's pace; at one time bathed in sweat or with congealed face and fingers, dead-beat or vibrant as a lark, thoughtful as a Doge or free from care. From fourteen to twenty years of age, when not in bed or at school, I almost lived upon that narrow saddle. What a prodigal of his time, you are thinking, and how much more profitably he could have been employed! Yes, waste of energy it may have been, but looking back on many of those golden hours, so would I once more live them, if I had the chance, an unrepentant and enraptured spendthrift! How else should I have watched the sun begin its rising, miraculously parting with those pale fingers the heavy curtain of obliterating Night, or followed it through all its phases, till it dipped into the west? Or marked the clouds in the early morning, in the virgin freshness of the east, delicate wafers of greenish light, or in late evening, when, like gigantic saurians, they hung upon the horizon, motionless and gorged with Fate? The smell of the earth after a spring shower, of reedy pools and last year's leaves, of salt-marsh and fen, of eglantine and lime-flower, of resinous bark and fresh plough, of new-mown hay, of byres and apple-orchards—how otherwise should I have garnered all your perfumes?—and these are the very breath of those enchanted days, witnesses that can

still be summoned of what has passed away. How else could I have seen at their daily tasks and in their hours of relaxation so many folk of every description—shepherds, inn-keepers, cowmen, trappers, pedlars, farmers, charcoal-burners, beemen, tramps, hop-pickers, thatchers, woodcutters, and fifty other types, foolish and intelligent, generous and greedy, youth and old?

Into these excursions the troubling factor of sex entered not at all. Two incidents, however, there were, vivid in memory even to this hour, that left at the time a profound impression on me, although they may appear to-day to be of so trivial and disconnected a character as not even to merit a passing glance. When about fifteen years of age, I was given a mathematical tutor for the summer holidays. He was a Newfoundland-dog kind of a fellow, just down from the university, uncouth, and, as I remember overhearing my father say, very moderately endowed with brains. He probably knew a good deal more about football than trigonometry, and how to teach cricket than the differential calculus. Sometimes he would ride out with me, when I noticed that he always chose the direction of a certain village about five miles off. When, however, we had passed through it, he would at once turn about, as though the country beyond had no possible attraction for him. Now, out of a first-storey window of an old-fashioned cottage there would always be leaning, her arms on the sill, the fine figure of a young woman. My tutor would slow down and, without dismounting, balance himself with his hand on the wall and, a few

muttered observations having been exchanged between them, the gist of which I never could catch, we would continue our ride to the end of the village, the same procedure being followed at the trysting-place on the return journey. At this distance of time I can only recall a pair of voluptuous shoulders and a mane of golden locks. Her features and expression, her general appearance even, have slipped into oblivion. In all, I must have seen her on seven or eight occasions, and at each encounter with the tutor I noticed that she seemed to be a shade less forthcoming, a fraction more reserved, as the days went by. Then, one morning, and she was no longer there. The window was wide open, the clematis and jasmine were climbing about the eaves and as sweet as ever, but the casement was void and the house quite still. My tutor leant against the wall for a moment and gave a peculiar whistle, to which, however, there was no response; and then, suddenly, as he moved disconsolately away, a small cardboard box was flung out by an unseen hand and fell at his feet. He dismounted, picked it up, and slowly started on his way towards home. When we had gone about a quarter of a mile, he got off again and, propping his bike against a hedge, sat by the roadside at the entrance to a wood. It was difficult for me to make out all the details distinctly, as he had placed himself several yards away and slightly turned his back, but I saw him out of the corner of my eye slide the box open, extract something that glinted in the sunlight, pore over it for a moment or two, groaning some words as it rested on his knees, and then, rising to his feet, and as

though he were throwing a cricket-ball, cast whatever it was far out into the undergrowth. When he turned to me again, his face was white and his lips trembling. We mounted our machines and not a word was spoken the rest of the way—except that, just as our chimneys came into view, he looked down at me and said—his face was still convulsed and drawn—‘This is my last ride.’ As he was leaving us the next morning, the remark at the time did not strike me as peculiar. But that afternoon he went for a swim. A fisherman, standing on the shore, related afterwards that he warned the young man of a strong undercurrent at that part of the coast, but that the latter, who was a good swimmer, said he knew all about it. When about a quarter of a mile out, however, the fisherman continued, he noticed that the swimmer seemed to be in difficulties and, putting out in a boat, hurried to his assistance, arriving just in time. It was agreed that, powerful swimmer though he was, the treacherous current must have swept him out to sea, and that, in struggling to get back, an attack of cramp may have seized his limbs. The theory was plausible and generally accepted, but I, personally, had some doubts, and so, perhaps, had someone else. The next morning he left us, and I never saw him again.

The other incident, and I apologize for its slightness, was this. About a year later, I was out for a ride with a schoolboy friend. He was fair and I was dark. We were passing over a lonely stretch of common, covered with gorse and scrub, when a couple of strapping wenches, who had been picking blackberries, set down their baskets and stood in our

way. We tried to pass, but they laughed loudly, caught hold of the handles of our cycles and pulled us off. One of them was a blonde and the other had hair like a raven's wing. 'I'll have the dark one,' said the blonde. 'All right,' said the other, 'I'll take the little fair-haired devil.' At that moment, a man, driving a trap, appeared over the crest of the hill. The two girls let us go, and, hopping into our saddles, we made off as fast as we could. But the singular part of the adventure was this, that we never thereafter made the slightest allusion to it, even with ourselves.

It was a particular treat in those days, as also in later years, to turn at times off the populated highway into some leafy lane in quest of solitude. A gate in the hedge would soon be reached, with a field beyond, a lovely stretch of smiling pasture with a score of russet cattle, with silken flanks, munching at their leisure. At one end there would be a copse and in the distance a range of violet downs, undulating gently until lost to view. If you leant your bike against the inside of the fence, you could lie upon this yielding turf and be cut off from all human contact for hours together. There was no need here for ambition or effort, for nothing was expected of you; no elbowing or clash of wills; no restive pressure below from those in a hurry to climb, or cold glances from above; no barometer of public opinion; no servile flattery or contemptuous disregard. There was naught to remind you of the ceaseless struggle for existence, of grim, disheartening poverty, of disease and mutilation, of the inequalities of station and opportunity, of cruelty and vice.

You were lord of your domain for that short space, and the repast of beauty was spread before you. No interruption was possible, no hatreds, or jealousies, or disappointments. Peace was there for the asking, balm for tortured spirit or evil fortune, peace that enveloped and drenched you, till you were conscious of being one with misty hill and green herb. A well of deep contentment filled in you to the brim, but not only that, a tide of ecstasy swept over you, and you felt yourself to be indestructible, something permanent and potent, while man-made worries melted into nothingness. You had ceased to be a practical person and had become a poet, hearkening to the music of growing things and the beat of the Earth's heart. The giant willow at your elbow was no longer a soulless plant, but a fellow-being; or, rather, you yourself had ceased to be a mortal, and were living the life of the tree, part of the landscape, an integral element of its mysterious existence. You were engulfed in the peace of this meadow, its indifference to change, to the future and the past, to hopes and memories, and all you asked was to be let alone, allowed gradually to become incorporated with the tranquil scene, and then, perchance, to fall asleep.

Of quite another kind were the hours spent at the wayside inns that sprinkle the landscape of rural Britain. With what pleasurable anticipation would I stable my trusty steel nag in the yard of some hostelry and make for the commercial-room! Many a traveller have I held in talk over a plate of eggs and bacon and a pot of beer. They passed with their bags of samples across my vision and then

disappeared for ever. It was the transiency, the rootless character of our mutual relationships, that tempted to intimacies which would never otherwise have been conceded. If you are dying, what does it signify if you tell your nurse that you have written bad poetry in secret for years; that, when you were a boy, you were expelled from school; or that some awkward temptation has followed you through life? It matters not a whit, for she has heard confidences by the dozen, and in a couple of months will forget she ever saw you. In the same way did some of these commercial travellers unbosom themselves over their glass of ale or spirits, knowing that in a brief hour or two we should have parted, in all probability never to meet again, our very encounter, much more the subject of discussion, being utterly wiped from our minds. One such meeting I remember well. It was an evening in autumn. Outside the 'pub' I had chosen for a rest a young man was standing, agaze at the molten rim where the sun had just gone down. A few minutes later I found myself in the coffee-room, where a cosy fire was burning and the stranger, whom I had seen outside, my only fellow-guest. He turned out to be a 'commercial,' travelling in 'lino,' and on his way to a big centre in the North. As was generally my way on such occasions, after a few introductory commonplaces, I turned the talk to personal reminiscence, recounting some of my experiences, and, as I warmed to the subject, giving him a bird's-eye view of my outlook on life. Little by little he responded and began in turn to speak about himself. He was twenty-six years of age, and new

to the business of travelling, in which he had been engaged for only eight or nine months. Previously he had been in an architect's employ, and, earlier still, an assistant to a picture-cleaner, having originally started in a firm of solicitors who did business for his family. So many chops and changes, he said, might give me the impression that he was not much better than a rolling stone, unwilling to stick at any work. But that was not so. Unfortunately there was a tragedy in his history, a black horror, that ever lay in wait, a poisonous taint, inherited, he believed, with the blood of his race, and over which he had no control. Periodically he became conscious of the awful blight of madness stealing over him, when he would hasten to a sister, who was unmarried and lived in a cottage near London, and there would bide under her care, hidden from his fellows, until he was well again. If the period of recovery were too prolonged, he would lose whatever job he had at the time and be driven to seek another; but sometimes these bouts of insanity would only last for a few days. That very evening in front of the inn, he had suddenly felt this foul hydra beginning to envelop him. The visitations were of no danger to others, the form they took being fits of such terrible despondency that he was tempted to take his own life. On two occasions he had nearly succumbed, and thenceforward had made up his mind, whenever there was any intimation of an approaching attack, to go to his sister at once and remain with her till it was over. That night he would catch a train and get to her in the morning. Before we parted, he let fall some details

regarding the course of his malady—how the disease inexorably, but slowly advanced, thus giving him time to make his plans. The warning began with pains in his head, and the onset of despair invariably followed, becoming more and more overwhelming, until at length no hope seemed to be left either in this world or for the next. It was then that his sister took charge, never leaving him night or day. As he sat there by the fire in the darkening room, his head in his hands, young, refined-looking, in outward semblance so full of promise, I thought it the saddest sight I had ever seen. What has happened to you since, poor vagrant? Are you still wandering over the face of England, taking refuge at times under that healing cottage-roof, or are you, perhaps, immured in one of those most tragic of all retreats, with longer and longer periods of unreason? More fortunate are you, if, sleeping peacefully in some grass-gown corner, where the dew gathers in the starlight, the blackbird in the early morning pipes your simple requiem.

The stage revolves and a very different scene is now before me. With forty thousand others, I am watching the dirt-track racing in one of the great manufacturing cities of the black country. Immense arc-lights are suspended over the arena of the vast stadium, yet the dust hangs so thickly in the atmosphere that the figures below seem to be moving in a kind of haze. Outside the Metropolis this is the most up-to-date speedway for motor cycles in the United Kingdom. The organization is wellnigh perfect. The car-park stretches deep and wide on one side of the main gates, and a number of entrances,

each with its turnstile, uniformed attendant, and box-office clerk, are distributed round the base of this modern Coliseum. An air of concentrated purpose distinguishes the swarm of human atoms that pour into this enormous hive. Like black worker-bees they seem to appear from nowhere out of the void and, congregating in their thousands at the narrow openings of the overshadowing pile, are sucked in immediately and lost to view. A directorate of local distinction arranges and presides over the meetings, and one of the chief officials, the referee, to whom appeal is made in the event of dispute, is a popular and athletic parson, with a poor parish in the centre of the town, who gives his services free. For no betting is allowed, and his presence there, as he stands in clerical collar and dark grey knickerbockers in full view under the most powerful of the lights, lends an air of respectability to the proceedings and acts as a safeguard against riotous behaviour. Holy orders, for once in a way, although not to the holder, are a distinct commercial asset, for the racing is promoted by a limited company who are expected to show a handsome profit. On various occasions have I attended these contests to be one of the populace; to listen to the clamour of forty thousand throats; to share in the tension, fury, disappointment, exultation, as the favourites lose or win, to sense the brutal instincts of a huge crowd, gathering force, but never so unleashed as to ruffle the equanimity of the management or drive the reverend pastor in sorrow from the scene. Must not the Roman amphitheatre have been something like this, when gladiators hacked themselves in pieces,


and wild beasts took part in the spectacles; when charioteers were mangled under hoof and wheel; when the Emperor of the world looked down from the royal box, and the satiated citizens, pleased or displeased, sent one man to his death and the other back to his wife and children? Human nature differs but little under the Caesars or George the Fifth, the priest of Jupiter or the Archbishop of Canterbury, in the year two or nineteen thirty-two.

Another race is preparing to start. The competitors are all lined up, seated on their machines, hooded and padded, like divers about to explore the deep—Bronco Smith, Clem Greener, Gus Wells, Tiger Johnson, Andy Luck, and Squib Card. Behind each of them, with his hands on the back of the saddle, is the runner who has to push him off. The flag drops and away they shoot. With every yard the speed increases, till the track is a whirlwind of roaring sound. The atmosphere grows dim with dust and the frenzy of the race is at white-heat. Ambulance men are waiting at the bends, and through the shattering explosions of cylinder and exhaust you can feel the thudding of your own heart. Suddenly there is a smash. At fifty miles an hour two riders have collided, trying to pass one another. One of them is hurled into the middle of the track, stands on his head for one brief moment, then collapses, and a machine behind hurtles over him. He is picked up by the ambulance between the laps, laid on a stretcher and carried out. Another man is limping back towards the judges' box. The pace, the skill, the daring are almost unbelievable. At each of the corners the ponderous

masses of mechanism heel over until they are almost level with the ground and look as though they could not help but crash. In clouds of suffocating cinder and to the thunder of their super-engines they charge down upon one another, cutting in at fearful angles and with hairbreadth escapes. Their jockeys ride like demons in Hell, masked, merciless, evil, in a blaze of sulphurous light, with thousands of the damned, seated in darkness, looking on. A dispute has taken place. Bronco Smith has fouled Squib Card, but been adjudged the victory all the same. A tempest of anger bursts from forty thousand throats, for the foul was obvious, or so it seemed. The judges, however, abide by their decision, and the clerical gentleman appeals with a megaphone for order and fair play. But a savage growl rolls over this human sea, and its mood has become ugly. The doubtful victor of the last race is riding in the next. He hails from a Brisbane club that has produced some famous performers. Taking a bend in the second lap at top speed, another rider volleys past him on the inside, and Bronco Smith, oversliding right across the track, hits the fence with fearful force. Motionless there he lies, with two hundred and eighty pounds of metal on the top of him. The ambulance men rush across, extricate him from the machinery, and, hurriedly lifting him on to a stretcher, bear him away. A yell of triumph greets this terrible fall and screams of hatred follow him as he is carried out—the blood-lust of the multitude has broken loose and a victim has had to be offered up.

At these meetings there was one rider, Bert

Pengelly, who took greater risks than anyone. Never once, however, did I see him come down, and his victories were many. He would charge the bends at full speed, cutting the corners finer than any of the others, and 'sliding' at an angle that seemed physically impossible to the unlearned eye. Lion-hearted and adored as such, he was the favourite of this critical crowd, so difficult and dangerous to please. By trade an engineer and engaged to be married, he used to take his young woman on Sundays for a ride in the country. One afternoon, leaving the house where he lived, a clumsy amateur, recklessly riding another motor cycle out of a side-street, ran full tilt into him without warning. Bert was picked up broken and unconscious, taken to the hospital, and died there a few hours later. For years he had escaped all the perils of the dirt-track, its fantastic hazards, the sudden challenges of imminent death; outfaced them all, night after night, on the chief tracks of the world, under the gaze of many nations; and, then, that calm Sunday afternoon, a few paces from his own door, riding quietly, thinking of his girl, is dashed from the saddle and killed at last. The pity of it! I, for one, shall not forget you, Bert Pengelly, nor your courage, your fine temper, your gallantry, the great sport you showed us all.



THE PHILOSOPHY OF BEAUTY

A THING of beauty is something that affects the eye or ear in a particular and pleasing manner. This capacity for beauty, however, is not a law of the object's being in every place and at all times for all persons, in the same way that a circle is always a circle and not a straight line, but is a variable and intermittent creation of the intellect. It is not a quality immanent in things, nor even the mode in which everyone consistently regards them, but is merely the manner in which from time to time they are regarded by particular people. In other words, it is not an active quality, bringing its influence to bear on a more or less passive subject, but is itself the result of an active and imaginative intelligence. It is true that the senses of the percipient person are affected, but these affections are almost wholly shaped and controlled by the mind. For canons of beauty vary in different individuals, different nations, different climes, and different epochs. The same object may be beautiful to the eye or ear of one person, and a matter of complete indifference or even distaste to another. A Greek statue, for instance, a painting by Correggio, or the city of Venice by moonlight, might arouse no feeling of beauty in an average labourer, not because his

physical senses were less alive, but because his intellect had failed to appreciate many of the relationships between these objects and certain ideal conceptions which would have been seen at once by a more cultivated vision.

The same is true of music. An oratorio of Handel's might be nothing but a turmoil of cacophony to a simple peasant, who, nevertheless, might have so delicate an organ of hearing as to catch distant notes that would be quite inaudible to many admirers of the great master. On the other hand, harmonies considered beautiful by the aborigines of Patagonia might not pass muster in Covent Garden. Or again, a symphony of Beethoven's that holds an educated audience entranced to-day may seem crude and barbarous to musical students five thousand years hence.

Beauty, then, does not belong as an inhering quality or unalterable law to the thing seen or heard, but is stamped upon the object by the active imagination of the person with eyes and ears to see or listen to it. It is the ideal quality which we fashion for ourselves and to which we feel the object has some special near relationship. It is the communion, in short, which we believe we discover between it and the images of our own exploring thought, that makes it a thing of beauty for us, or in the absence of this communion an object of indifference or disgust. What is beautiful to us when we are boys often ceases to be so in later years. What seems commonplace when we are youths frequently becomes beautiful to us as we grow older. We transfer the crown of loveliness from one object

to another; and just as we, as individuals, do this, so also do nations and schools and epochs.

There is, therefore, no fixed form of beauty, nor can there ever be. It can claim no definite and precise rules, for the intellect of man is restless. Relationships are always being discovered between objects of the material world and ideal conceptions that in turn are always being changed; and these relationships are being perpetually lost again, so that there is a continual shifting in the standards that are set up. Different races have their own favourite prototypes or ideal conceptions, and owing to climatic conditions, to environment, to tradition, to training, what is lovely to one set of people is often hideous to another.

Indeed, that it is a subjective and intellectual act, independent and variable, rather than any quality inhering in the object or any law of its being, that constitutes what is known as the beautiful, becomes apparent in whatever set of examples may be chosen. A snow-covered Alp, seen in the distance, is beautiful to the intelligent tourist, but probably conveys no aesthetic pleasure whatever to many of those who have lived in sight of it all their lives, no other sentiment, perhaps, than a feeling of confinement, or of anxiety lest an avalanche should overwhelm them unawares. It is beautiful to the traveller because he can associate it, maybe unconsciously, with certain idealistic conceptions of his own. He sees the lofty, snow-capped summit, lifting itself high above its neighbours, and immediately it becomes for him something unattainable, eternal, pure. He sees in its height and surroundings the

first quality, in the material of which he knows it to be made the second, and in its starry robe the third; and in their combination he calls the possessor of them beautiful. But this loveliness is his own creation. It is not in the mountain, but in himself. He has conjured up these relationships to the ideal conceptions of his own mind, which in their union make the scene a beautiful one for him, a scene which without this imaginative activity would cease to be beautiful. To an untrained observer, on the other hand, or rather to a different kind of observer, the mountain might merely suggest fatigue, inconvenience, or peril.

Again, in the case of a beautiful sunset we have before us the stupendous result of occult agencies and the dramatic change and contrast between the greatest dramatic display we can ever be witnesses of and black night, the completest want of light and colour that any mortal can experience. In addition to these, we are also aware of the irrecoverable nature of the spectacle, its fleeting and transient character. Here, then, are the facts ready to hand, and we find them attuned, more completely perhaps than in any other natural phenomenon, to the ideal conceptions we are always constructing of the power and mystery of the unseen forces of the universe side by side with the mutability, the transitoriness, the eternal changefulness, of all being. And this last, again, induces a feeling of sadness, which is rarely absent from and always enhances the effect of the beautiful—a stirring of compassion for the world in general, a feeling of association that we, too, are transitory. An unimaginative person might

not see these relationships, and would therefore feel none of these things, and the sunset for him would not be beautiful or sublime. He would merely glance at it for omens of the weather on the morrow.

Or take a beautiful Englishwoman. Although lovely in her own latitude, she might excite no admiration among the natives of New Guinea or the Bushmen of South Africa. Similarly, a female Papuan or a Bushwoman, beautiful to her own people, might fail to be admired if she journeyed north or west. Yet they are all three beautiful, not because of any inhering quality of beauty, as such, in any of them, but because in the minds of their compatriots they seem respectively to approximate to certain prototypes or conceptions that are ideal. The Englishman, the Papuan, and the Bushman see in one or another of these women an object resembling their ideal conception of youth, a form as nearly in accordance with it as they can find. They see the embodied moment that will pass, the short span before decay sets in; and this aspect they bring into relation with their ideal conception of enduring achievement, of undying perfection, and so the object is idealized by them, and they call it beauty. Any person, therefore, whose form and features conjure up these relationships to the ideals of their own thought, in whom they seem to see these evidences of arrested time and defeated mutability, they idealize for the moment in their own manner and according to the flight of their own fancy, and call beautiful. Youth may bear traces of decay and age, just as age may preserve the symbols of ripeness and youth. But the more the contours


and lineaments of a person wear the aspect of culminating youth, of that hour of bloom, of completion, that has not yet departed, so much the more will the observer's intellect fashion upon the object an ideal image, the conception of eternal perfection, of the absence of change and dissolution, which he here calls beauty—a conception which is tinged with a measure of sadness, too, and so of tenderness, at the besieging and inevitable thought of the fleeting character, the doomed transience, of everything earthly.

Not only, therefore, are there no objective qualities of beauty, as such, inherent in things, but there is no such thing as beauty in the sense of some one invariable and universal attribute which must always be understood to be connected with an object before it can be regarded as beautiful. In other words, not only does the imaginative faculty in man actively create beauty for itself, arbitrarily constructing it out of relationships between worldly phenomena and conceptions of its own, but it can give birth to different kinds of beauty which need have no element or basis in common. It is, therefore, an idle search to seek for some common ground or formula in all beauty, such as a particular proportion in curves or angles. In every case either differing intellectual faculties in various individuals are creating their own standards of beauty, or the same individual is presenting pictures to himself of various objects, their several beauties being formed out of the relationship he finds in them to different idealistic conceptions that need have nothing in common.

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The only starting-point general to all intellectual activity that is creating loveliness for itself may be said to consist in this, that the imagination is continually striving to picture to itself the ideal, and from time to time discovers in objects a kinship, as it believes, with these elusive images of its own thought. The greater the number of these detected points of kinship, or the clearer they seem, the more beautiful to it will an object be, although it is found that even at the best an unbridgable gulf yawns between the ideal and the real—the infinite and the finite—and a feeling of sorrowfulness arises, a sentiment sometimes of compassion and even of tragedy, which all the more endears to us the things that we have crowned. Indeed, great beauty almost always stirs in us a half-submerged feeling of melancholy or pity which adds to our affection for it or increases its mystery. For in nearly every case the object of beauty, already related by us to an ideal and infinite conception, is nevertheless associated with the knowledge of the ceaseless passage of time, the transitoriness of all things. In the case of the sunset or the beautiful woman it is their own ephemeral character that stirs our compassion and is therefore a component part of their attraction for us. In that of the everlasting mountain it is its comparison with our own fleeting life that gives it a part of its sublimity. In all three a feeling of half-conscious sadness is induced—compassion for the objects in the first two cases, pity for ourselves in contrast with the object in the last, regret at the thought of parting from something we have attuned to our ideal conception of the eternal.

For all these reasons we can forgive nearly every fault that Beauty may commit. We condone error and are ready to expend time, treasure, and affection without return. So long as the object is to us beautiful, it can do no harm. Its end is itself. It has more value for us than the good, the wise, or the faithful, for we have created it out of our living thought, out of the mysterious activities of the soul, and we therefore love it as the highest embodiment of our emotional being.



THE LAW OF COMPENSATION

IT is adversity that teaches us to draw happiness from life. Not that mere animal contentment or those high spirits that are unreflecting and almost unconscious of light and shade, but that rapture of relief and thankfulness, that savouring of every precious moment, that deep bliss that wells within us from time to time as we grow older and more experienced. When Winter has chilled us and strewn the land with its wreckage, how sweet it is to feel the first true kiss of Spring, the return of Nature's kindness after all her harshness and rude buffetings! And do we not love the child that was once so nearly lost a fraction more tenderly than the others for whom we have never felt anxiety? It is the contrast with the past that endears the present to us, that fills us with that calm delight in comparing what is with what has been and may be again. Thus it is that the shocks of life, its betrayals and disappointments, its tragedies and cruelties, instead of blunting us to all their opposites, sharpen our hunger for them, so that, when at length they present themselves, we seize upon them almost savagely for fear they may be snatched from us again.

It is only those who have been in the trough who

can rise to the crest of happiness. This is the unavoidable condition—that you cannot greatly feel joy without its equipoise in suffering and sorrow. They are Fortune's twins, joined by a link that cannot be severed without the death of both; and the uglier the one, the more beautiful the other. This is the great compromise that reconciles the most wretched to his miserable lot, that ploughs those trenches in the cheeks of him that all men envy and wearies to distraction the idler with no occupation, whose daily round brings scarcely any trouble and scarcely any bliss. We see these contrasts everywhere. The law of compensation comes home to us most nearly when we study our own kind; but the very flowers of the field and the processes of Nature are witnesses to its working. The brightest things are the shortest lived and often the weakest. What they gain in radiance they sacrifice in strength; what they lose in certainty they find in beauty.

Let him remember this who is crippled by poverty or lamed by other circumstance. For he has thereby established a claim, that sooner or later will be honoured, to keener pleasure and profounder bliss, to rarer and more concentrated rapture than is ever vouchsafed to those who happen to be more fortunate. He is assured of such spells of anticipation and hope as they have never dreamed of; of tranquil hours of comfort, when the stress is past, such as they will never know; of unexpected releases and triumphs, of mornings and afternoons and evenings, alone or with loved ones, that will bring such a sublimity of peace into the pauses of his pain as will redeem his sufferings many-fold. If he is poor,

is there not someone to share his poverty and will not mutual sacrifices glorify the companionship with all the deeper love? If he is deformed has he not the realms of imagination, of literature and art to roam in, where his body will be as perfect and his strength as whole as those of the heroes they describe, and where, unblinded by the dust of vulgar conflict, he can withdraw into solitude to master their beauties and create a world of his own? Though he be a convicted criminal or shamed before men, so true is this law of distributive justice, that even he, nay, he more than any other, will taste each drop of consolation as it falls upon his lips with a fever of gratitude and relief unknown to those who, equally guilty perhaps, have never so nearly died of thirst.

Courage! therefore, pilgrim, who with sharp stones in your shoes are limping down the highway to the distant shrine of your hopes. When the heat parches your tongue, here and there will be a clear spring by the wayside with such draughts of coolness to refresh you as are only found upon this road. When icy rains freeze you and soak your rags, you will come across a homestead, a palace that you never will forget, where love will shelter you and save you from death. And look to it, you, who by Fortune's whim have so long been left in ease of body and mind! The change must come, of a sudden, or perhaps by gradual approaches, when, gazing back upon the present, what you now regard so indifferently and as a matter of course will seem like heaven. You will have had your day, and night will be upon you. Maybe, you will survive to emerge

into another dawn. If that be your lot, by then at least you will have become a philosopher, no longer insensible to the smiles of Fate, but conscious of the operation of this universal code which provides that, sooner or later, there shall be an equivalent for all our pleasures and for all our woes.

XXIII

THE DUTIES OF CITIZENSHIP*

LADIES and Gentlemen, it is a privilege to have been invited to address you to-night. I have often read of the Philip Stott College, but have never had the honour of meeting its students at home. As you know, Members of Parliament are accustomed to speak at public meetings. You have doubtless all been to such meetings and you are aware of what type of oratory platform speech-making belongs to, especially at election time. Sometimes it is undisguised tub-thumping, at others mere rhetoric, and generally speaking, it is meant only for the moment and is forgotten in a day. I do not want to indulge in platform speaking to-night. It is very well in its season, but sometimes it is out of season, and I am sure that it would be out of season this evening. To-night, if possible, I want you to take a wider view than that of merely party politics.

To remain a sectional partisan and nothing more, is to lose a proper perspective in public affairs and to become a wire-puller rather than a statesman. We have all got to be partisans, but we must aim at being something in addition. We must get to the bottom of our faith, to the roots that feed and

* An address given to the Students of the Philip Stott College, 1925.

keep it from falling. We must try to understand what our party cries are founded upon; what they mean, and why we believe them to be true. And if we discover that, our beliefs will be established upon a rock. Our faith will never be shaken, and what is more, we shall be able to hold our own more effectively with political opponents and gain more adherents to our cause.

To-night I should like to touch very shortly upon certain aspects of modern politics. I am doubtful where to begin or end, the subject is so vast, for it covers the wide world and almost every interest in life. But I thought it might be useful to consider our duty as citizens and what is required of us in that capacity. We hear a great deal about the duties of Governments, statesmen, and politicians and their lamentable shortcomings. But we rarely hear of the equally important duties of the individual citizen and his shortcomings. Therefore, I propose for a brief half-hour to talk about the duties of citizenship.

Although every one of us is a human unit with his own separate tastes, peculiarities, outlook, and character, we cannot live our lives independently without the good will and co-operation of others. To extract the full benefit of what the world has to offer, we are obliged to sacrifice some of our individuality, surrender some of our freedom, and act together. This is why there have to be not only societies, firms, partnerships, companies, and so forth, but a central organization or Government, to co-ordinate effort and supervise the activities of the community. Without some such unifying process it

would be impossible for the several human units to reap full advantage from the fruits of the earth or to make full use of the wonderful inventions of man.

A central Government is therefore indispensable, but it is vital that every one of the citizen units (and you are some of them) should keep a vigilant watch. The citizen must never surrender his ultimate rights of criticism into the hands of any central power. A Government exists for the benefit of the governed, not the governed for any Government. If the citizens feel that their affairs are being mismanaged, it is their clear duty to bring about a change in the administration. Government is their servant, not their master. They set it up for the common weal, and it is only for so long as it discharges its functions to that end that it has any right to power. Every citizen, therefore, should learn something about the science of politics: and the best method in the first place is to study the histories of the chief nations of the world. He will read there of mistakes made in the past, some of them irremediable, not only by monarchs, tyrants, and dictators, by prophets, presidents, and demagogues. He will also come across equally disastrous errors committed by whole peoples, by Republics, by Parliaments, by Senators, and by mobs. One need only cite the disastrous expedition against Syracuse by the Athenians, which practically finished their history as a great people. Or the enormous extravagance of the French Courts in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with desperate poverty outside their doors, which culminated in the Revolution. Or the over-weening ambition of

Napoleon that led him to Russia and destroyed his might amid her snows. Or the insane policy of taxation which lost us the American Colonies. Or the invasion of Belgium by Germany, not so long ago, which brought the might of England into the Great War. The examples are legion. In studying history he will obtain a kind of vicarious experience and understand in a general way what ought to be aimed at and what guarded against and avoided in the future. He will not then be so likely to make grave mistakes when he takes part in public affairs or has to give an opinion or record a vote. He will not be so easily influenced by agitators and quacks either in the Press or on the platform. He will probably take a longer and saner view, remembering the chequered story of the past. This will be all to the good. This is what self-education will do for him. It will train his judgment, make him a more useful citizen and a wiser counsellor for his fellows. The citizen should also study the immediate questions of the day. The body politic cannot stand still. It is always either progressing or slipping back. The community are either becoming more prosperous and happier or less prosperous and happy. There is no such thing as a static condition in life. You are losing or gaining ground all the time. Unless you are becoming better, you are getting worse. Therefore a Government must never be content. Their aim must be unrelaxed effort and the devising of new schemes of improvement. They must never rest upon their oars. Therefore it is the constant duty of the citizen to keep his Government up to the mark.

Now, in this connection there are two dangers which have beset Governments since history began. Every organized community has suffered from time to time from two classes of persons. There are always a number of people to whose personal advantage it is that social reform should be delayed. A change for the better would mean a curtailment of their privileges and vested interests. This is a selfish, although natural attitude, and it is the business of the citizen to see that obstructive forces of this kind do not stand in the way of reform. His Government must not be allowed to be deterred by menace from doing what they believe to be in the interests of the public weal.

But there is still greater danger of an opposite kind. There are always a number of people with nothing to lose and a good deal to gain by agitation. They batten upon ignorance and climb upon the shoulders of those who are not alert enough to realize what the objects of these climbers really are. They often stand to make personal profit by creating discontent and preaching revolution. Their remedies are frequently crude and ridiculous. In fact, their so-called cures would in many cases poison the patient whom they pretend to relieve. They are often vain and uneducated, or embittered by some misfortune in their own lives, and their chief influence is derived among other ignorant people, rather by clamour and persistence than by any wisdom or merit attaching to their arguments. They occasionally acquire influence also among some of the more educated and thoughtful who see around them much that stands in need of reform,

but who with all their honesty of purpose are lacking in judgment and a sense of proportion.

It is one of the tasks of the good citizen to unmask agitators of this kind and bring his fellows to a sane view. He has to steer between the two evils—the selfish policy of inaction or reaction on the one hand, and the equally self-interested campaign of the ranting demagogue on the other. His duty is to see that his Government is one of progress. But it is equally for him to be vigilant that it is not rushed into wild-cat schemes, nor scared into economic or social upheaval which he and his children might be sorry for in years to come. This is statesmanship, and the average citizen is often far more capable of deciding on broad lines what is best for the country than the Minister who is harassed by the cares of office or the ambitious politician who wants to get on.

As you look round, you will, I think, find that the two most difficult problems for statesmanship to-day are the following: First of all, there is a general feeling, especially among the younger generation, that everyone has a claim to his place in the sun. That is to say, that everyone has a right to a more or less equal measure of happiness and opportunity. That it should not be the lot of some men to labour and to remain poor and of others to be rich and idle, but that everyone has a right to stake out his claim with the rest. The Great War has intensified this feeling and made millions of people determined to squeeze as much pleasure and advantage from life as possible before they die; and they are resolved to win it at almost any cost. This increased determination to have a good time is not only natural but

healthy, and it is one of the tasks of statesmen to raise the standard of living of the people. Indeed, in view of improved education, it is a natural and imperative demand. But this natural and proper desire may easily degenerate into a mere scramble for money and what money brings. I need hardly remind you, for you know very well, that no lasting pleasure can be extracted from life without labour, for pleasure without work is like ashes in the mouth. The ambition of every citizen ought therefore to be, not so much merely to be happier, as to deserve more happiness; not so much merely to be more prosperous, as to deserve more prosperity; for without the desert the individual gain will bring no lasting satisfaction. It lies therefore with the body of citizens, while urging their Governments to do all they can to improve the lot of the governed, to remember and preach this need of honourable work, of noble ideals, of personal self-sacrifice, of this pre-requisite of desert, without which the goods of the world taste like dust and prove but dross. This is where the Communists fail. All the time they are insisting upon the material advantages of what they claim will be the result of their policy, and thrusting into the background everything that makes life really worth living. They are the materialists of modern politics and the fruits they promise will wither in the plucking.

The second difficult problem for statesmanship, in view of the international revolutionary movement, is this: How best to reconcile the special patriotism for one's country with the ideal of the general good of the whole of the rest of mankind?

Communists and International Socialists are for ever telling us that national patriotism and national boundaries should disappear, and that the world should be united in one brotherhood of man. They argue that a nation is in itself an anachronism and an evil, an artificial compound, a device of the capitalists for maintaining their privileges, and that the unit ought to be the habitable globe. Many of them, thinking that parental control serves to diminish the sovereignty of the State, argue that even the family is a mistake. That children should belong to the State, that even husband and wife should not permanently belong to one another. Many of them also argue that there should be no private possessions, no private enterprise, no individual initiative in work or industry; that we should all sacrifice our individualities for the sake of one world State, toiling for this abstract proposition and being in effect practically its slaves.

Now in all this they betray their want of knowledge of human nature and their ignorance of philosophic truths. The universe, although it may be a perfect whole, affords us, so far as we are concerned, very limited glimpses of itself. It is only in certain partial and changing aspects that we can see it at all. We are circumscribed in our functions and ideas, and although it may be true that, if we could see how the entire universe of mind and matter was put together, we should realize that it was one indivisible unit and the same in all its parts, its parts being merely aspects of the whole, we cannot do so now. To us the universe is made up of the

particular, that is, of millions of different details, which we cannot yet link up into one organic whole. It is only by and through its wonderful details that we get occasional and imperfect glimpses of the Universal. All we can do is to realize that this mystery is about us. Therefore, if we mistakenly regard certain limited aspects of the Universal as bad, merely because they do not give us the complete picture, we are ourselves running counter to the scheme of human life.

Now this is the error into which the Communists and some of the International Socialists have fallen. To them the nation is wrong in itself. It is a contrivance which must be abolished, because it is a limited community with special aspirations and interests of its own, and therefore an untruth in face of the possibility of a larger brotherhood. Their aim therefore is to destroy the citizen's respect for his laws, to undermine his love of country, to drive him to revolt from its customs, and to make him despise its history and traditions. By this means they hope gradually to exterminate in his breast all feelings of patriotism and loyalty to his fatherland. This shows their lamentable blindness to the course of human progress. It is through the unit of the family that the boy or man first learns to sink his individuality at times and to sacrifice himself for the benefit of others. It is in the family that he is first taught the lesson of unselfishness. It is there that he becomes conscious of a larger unit than merely himself. When he goes to school he becomes a member of a still bigger unit and the corporate feeling is still further developed in him. Later on,

in the University, the trade union, the Society, the particular sphere of his profession, he is taught to practise this lesson of altruism in a yet larger field—the lesson which he learnt first in the family and then at school.

And meanwhile around all these different units and enveloping them, there has gradually grown up in his mind the ideal of his nation and country, a still wider unit for which he is now prepared by his early training to sacrifice all the lesser interests and affections of his life. But without the preliminary discipline he would never have embraced this further lesson or been conscious of the ideal of self-sacrifice for his country. And it is when he has learnt this later lesson that he may also learn a final one, that it is sometimes necessary that a man should sacrifice himself for the good of the world. But though he may thus sacrifice himself, be he scientist, explorer, or prophet, he must not sacrifice the schools where that final great ideal was nurtured and bred. He must not destroy the ideal of the family or of the nation which, each in their several ways, taught him almost all he knows of self-sacrifice for his fellow-men and will teach generations yet to come. They are necessary and vital as perpetual schools for mankind. The fundamental error therefore of the International Revolutionaries is this: Instead of learning and teaching the lesson of self-sacrifice in all departments of life, they wish to pull up by the roots the very and only methods by which the lesson of final self-sacrifice for the benefit of mankind can gradually be learnt. This is why their doctrine of anti-nationality is incurably wrong, and why their

ship in the long run will inevitably go to pieces in the shallows.

National life is necessary, like family life and school life, and the life led subsequently in various societies, unions, and communities, which hold men together and teach them their duties one to another. In themselves they are imperfect, aspects merely of a profounder truth. But in order to appreciate that truth, these more limited aspects must be recognized as necessary elements in the scheme of human endeavour. They should therefore be revered as such and full value given to them.

I do not know whether any of you want or ever intend to enter Parliament. I hope that some of you do. It is a great, an exacting, and an honourable profession. Some people think that the only qualification for membership of the House of Commons is to have one's wits about one and to be able to talk with a glib tongue. That is a profound delusion, and one only held by people who have never been there. I have spent a good many years in the House of Commons, and have watched a number of Members of Parliament at work, from Prime Ministers downwards. My experience is that it is not the glib speakers, but the men with knowledge and character, who have had most influence in that assembly. I have heard many fluent speakers, and fluency alone counts for nothing there.

An important thing is that a man should be able to contribute to the debate—add a fresh argument or supply some interesting information—give a new turn to the discussion—offer sound opinions and advice—make his little contribution genuine, how-

ever small. But more important still, much more, is that he should have character. If a man has not character, he may possess the eloquence of Demosthenes and the subtlety of Machiavelli, but he will not have any abiding influence. It is not everyone who can be clever, nor everyone who can be eloquent, but it is given to most people to gain a reputation for steadfastness, uprightness, disinterestedness, and loyalty. It is also in their power to make themselves acquainted with some special branch of public life. Therefore there is not the slightest reason why some of you should not aspire to Parliament, and not only that, but aspire some day to hold a respected and good position there.

That is all I have to say this evening. It has been, I know, rather a dry and serious discourse, but it is well sometimes to travel outside the ordinary confines of party controversy and try to take a wider view. We are believers in our party's cause. We have in the present head of the Government an example of a statesman who, undeterred by personal considerations, is determined to plough his furrow straight. He has the character we look for in our leaders, and, if he is spared, will, I believe, do valuable work for the country and Empire. As citizens I hope that you will take your part in public affairs. Whatever your vocation be, you can obtain considerable influence, each one of you, if you take the trouble, and is it not worth while taking that trouble if you can help to mould the destinies of the race?

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